

Running head: SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH A WILDERNESS PROGRAM

Wild Civility: Cultivating the Foundations of Social Justice through Participation in a  
Wilderness Program

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**Abstract**

This heuristic inquiry examined if the foundations of social justice knowledge and beliefs were developed as a result of participation in a wilderness program and what knowledge and beliefs were developed. There were six participants in this study. Data collection involved participants completing pre- and post- program interviews and daily journals during the program. Through inductive analysis six themes emerged. Three of these were related to the development of certain foundations of social justice: (a) experienced conflict development and resolution; (b) experienced relationship change and development; and (c) shift from “me” to “we” mentality. The remaining three themes were included as additional findings: (a) experienced personal change and development; (b) identification of specific factors of the program responsible for changes; and (c) bringing learning back to everyday life. Results highlight wilderness program impacts on participants’ social justice knowledges and beliefs and inform wilderness program providers and social justice educators.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction

*It seemed to go on forever... Sitting in my canoe, at the top of the rapid, the only thing I could see was wave after wave, rising up above the river and then crashing back down. It had not looked this big from shore when I had volunteered to partner up with one of the weakest paddlers on our trip. Staring down at the rushing water, I regretted my decision. Our leaders had told us that the safest way to go down this rapid was straight through the middle, however, they warned us that the water would try and push us to the left, directly onto a fairly menacing rock face. They told my partner and I that both of us would need to paddle as hard as we could to steer the boat to the right, and avoid hitting the rocks. This strategy seemed simple enough from the shore, yet sitting in our boat in the final calm waters before the rapid, I was sure that we were heading for impending doom. I heard a whistle blow. This signaled that it was our turn to travel down the roaring channel of water and foam.*

*We started to paddle, me on the left, my partner on the right. Within seconds we were in the middle of waves that seemed as tall as trees. I could feel the power of the water pushing the boat to the left. I focused on my own strokes, trying my hardest to fight through the water to get to the other side of the rapid, yet my strokes felt ineffective. The harder I paddled, the more the boat pulled to the left. Then, for a second, time seemed to stop. Looking at my friend in the front of the boat, with the ominous rocks to our left growing larger and larger, I realized both of our strokes were negating the others. Each time I tried to turn the boat right, her stroke weakened the power in my own. We were each focusing on moving the boat ourselves, when in reality, we were in this together, our*



*fates intricately connected to one another. I called out to her, telling her to draw the boat to the right, as I paddled forward. Almost instantly, we started heading for the right hand shore. I looked up and noticed the rocks pass by, close to our left, so close I probably could have reached out and touched them. We kept paddling. Then, it was over as suddenly as it had started. We had made it through the biggest rapid on our whole trip, and we had done it together. I looked at my friend smiling back at me in the front of our boat and was thankful she was there. At that time, I only remember being excited and relieved, waving frantically at our friends and leaders on the shore. However, looking back years later, I have come to realize that this rapid, and this wilderness program in general had changed me. I had experienced a shift in the way I thought about myself in relation to the others on my program, a shift that would remain a part of me forever.*

More than six years after I went on this wilderness program, I began teacher's college equipped with the passion and motivation to become a teacher and to use education as a tool for transformation, in a manner similar to what the above educative outdoor experience had done for me. In teacher's college I was introduced to the concepts of social justice and experiential education, two philosophies with a particular focus on using education as a means to transform people and as a means to work toward actively engaging people in the creation of a better world (Association for Experiential Education, 2012; Okosun, 2009). It was during this time at teacher's college that I realized that both philosophies had been in part, responsible for the change within myself that had occurred on my wilderness program. The concepts of both social justice and experiential education have formed the foundation of the present study.

Over the past two decades, the term and ideals of social justice have appeared with increasing frequency in educational theory and practice (Cochran-Smith, 2008). There are several social justice philosophers who have focused almost exclusively on trying to define what is meant by the term social justice within an educational context (Coates, 2004; Gewirtz, 1998; North, 2006). Much of the present-day literature focuses on a theory of social justice, both in and out of the classroom, that is concerned with how people think about and treat each other (Applebaum, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Goodman, 2000). This particular theory of social justice is predicated on viewing this construct as a relational one, involving an examination of an individual and his/her surrounding community – a community in which the individual recognizes and understands that the success of others is tied to his/her own success and works positively with others to make that community one where all members are able to lead a fulfilled life (Goodman, 2000; Okosun, 2009). The specific focus on relationship development prescribed by this view of social justice development is resonant with my own transformative experience in the above narrative. Several social justice theorists have described this view of social justice in detail and have explicated certain foundations required to create the type of relationships that are instrumental to social justice development. These include, positive social interaction, equal cooperation, interdependence, reciprocity, acceptance of difference and demonstrating respect (Applebaum, 2008; Coates, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Fraser, 1997; Goodman, 2000; North, 2006; Young, 1990). Thus, developing relationships predicated on the above foundations of social justice represents one manner of developing the values and beliefs of social justice.

In addition to the considerable body of literature focused on conceptualizing social justice in an educational context, there is a substantial body of literature that explores the approaches educators may take to engage in social justice pedagogy. A review of relevant literature (Breunig, 2005; Itin, 1999; Lindsay & Ewert, 1999) revealed that many social justice pedagogues have been using a philosophy of education as old as the term education itself – experiential education – as a means to engage in active, meaningful learning about social justice. The theories and practices of experiential education gained a foothold in Western philosophies of education during the Progressive era in the early 1900s, in large part, as a result of the notable work of John Dewey (Dewey, 1938; Itin, 1999). Dewey’s vision of experiential education represented a form of education that was child-centered and focused on creating a comprehensive system for the development of the “whole” child (Breunig, 2008; Zilversmit, 1993). Moreover, Dewey theorized that education should have goals that go beyond reading, writing and arithmetic (Itin, 1999). For Dewey, the greatest philosophical aim of education was the promotion of a democratic society – one whose citizens were working towards positive social change (Itin, 1999). These progressive ideals also extend into the many branches of experiential education.

This present study focused on one particular branch of experiential education, outdoor education. Outdoor education refers to “educational situations that take place in a wilderness/outdoor setting and have an element of adventure or challenge [that is] used as a method to educate through direct experience” (Warren, 2005, p. 89). The emergence of outdoor education as a viable pedagogy is most often credited to Kurt Hahn and his creation of one particular outdoor school, Outward Bound (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, &

Richards, 1997). Outward Bound was established in 1941 to encourage character development and self-discovery through the adventure and challenges of outdoor environments (Goldenberg, McAvoy, & Klenosky, 2005).

One specific goal of Outward Bound programs is to use the wilderness as a site to teach people about how to develop skills that would help to rectify what Hahn referred to as the degeneration of the global community (Warren, 2005). In the 70 years since the first Outward Bound school was opened, hundreds of other outdoor education schools, centres and programs have been built upon the ideal of using the outdoors as a site for interpersonal skill development that works toward the promotion of a socially just global community (Gager, Hendee, Kinziger, & Krumpe, 1998; Hattie et al., 1997). Today, there are numerous outdoor programs operating throughout the world that use the wilderness as a site to encourage social justice learning through promoting morality and responsibility and instilling participants with a sense of compassion for others (Warren, 2005). In sum, experiential education, and more specifically outdoor education and wilderness programs have been linked to the promotion of social justice in a variety of ways (Dewey, 1938; Itin, 1999; Warren, 2005).

Thinking back to my own experiences from the above narrative, I realized that I had in fact experienced first-hand the theories of educational philosophers such as Dewey and Hahn as well as theories of experiential education, outdoor education and social justice, as they are conceived in this present study. I do not, however, believe that the actual teaching about these theories was made explicit by the program instructors. Still though, I had unknowingly increased my own understanding of the foundations of social justice through developing a new view of myself in relation to others. Moreover, this

personal shift happened on an experientially based, wilderness program. Although several researchers have documented relationship development and the creation of community on wilderness programs (Breunig et al., 2008; Sharpe, 2005), none have explicitly examined the possibilities of wilderness programs as sites that could serve to promote social justice, particularly those foundations of social justice as outlined in this present study, with its focus on relationship-building. In fact, there was a complete lack of research that examined the kind of tacit experience that I had with the development of the foundations of social justice on my particular wilderness program. Furthermore, Ewert et al. (2000) identified a lack of research on the lived experience of students on wilderness programs in general.

The purpose of this present study was designed to address this gap, in part. My aim was to examine if the foundations of social justice knowledge and beliefs are developed as a result of participation in a wilderness program and what knowledge and beliefs are developed. Further to that, the purpose of this study was to explore if participants' reports about how their knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation on a wilderness program. Four research questions guided this study's purpose:

- 1) What do participants report about the way they view themselves in relation to others before and after their participation on a wilderness program? Have their pre- and post-program views shifted? In what ways?
- 2) What are the specific factors that participants identify as significant to their report about how they feel in relation to others pre- and post- program?

3) What are participants' views about the purpose of the wilderness program pre- and post- program? Do they report anything about the intersection between knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and wilderness program participation pre- and post- program? What specifically? Have their views shifted?

4) What are the specific factors that participants identify as significant to their report about the intersection between knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and wilderness program participation pre- and post- program?

To respond to these queries, I selected a qualitative, heuristic methodology (Moustakas, 1990). Heuristic inquiry is a process through which a researcher identifies tacit feelings and instincts within an experience and transfers this to an investigation of a similar experience in others, in which their own experience is a valuable source of information (Moustakas, 1990; Sela-Smith, 2002). My aim within this present study was to explore if participants' reports about how their knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation on a wilderness program, using myself and my own experiences as an additional source of data.

In heuristic inquiry, Moustakas (1990) promoted the use of as many participants as are needed to provide a deepened understanding of an experience or phenomena. As heuristic inquiry values depth over breadth, this present study used purposeful sampling to select six participants from a wilderness program. Both males and females comprised the study sample. All individuals registered in the program were asked to participate in the study, and five of the six agreed. Participants completed a pre- and post- program interview and wrote in journals. These methods of data collection were congruent with

heuristic “best practices” (Moustakas, 1990). Collected data were compiled to form individual depictions, and then underwent coding and categorization procedures to illuminate themes within participant experiences to form the composite depiction. The data analysis process was guided as well by heuristic “best practices” which emphasize that an inductive process of analysis should be used (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Moustakas, 1990; Patton, 2002). The individual depictions are presented in chapter four, followed by the composite depiction. Finally, this study presents a discussion and creative synthesis in chapter five.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

### **Introduction**

The foundational concepts for the present study, the primary ones being social justice and education, can be explored in a variety of ways. The following review of relevant literature will include sections that cover the following key concepts: social justice; social justice in education; social justice pedagogy; mainstream education; alternative education; experiential education; outdoor education; wilderness programs; and the intersection of social justice and experiential education and wilderness programs. It is my intent that this literature review will provide a solid foundation for the purpose of this present study, which, as previously stated, was to examine if the foundations of social justice knowledge and beliefs are developed as a result of participation in a wilderness program and what knowledge and beliefs are developed. Further to that, the purpose of this study was to explore if participants' reports about how their knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation on a wilderness program.

### **Social Justice – An Evolving Concept**

Social justice has become a bit of a buzzword and talk of it can be heard in classrooms, boardrooms, and living rooms. Yet, I wonder, do individuals understand the complexity of the term social justice? Is its meaning truly understood and known across these various contexts? In this section, I will first provide a brief history of social justice and trace the evolution of this concept through time. Second, I will explore present-day conceptions of social justice and examine some of its larger themes. Finally, I will



provide a definition of social justice that will become the working definition that I will employ for the purpose of the present study.

Although it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origin of the term social justice, what is known is that theories of social justice were being discussed in Africa and Asia even before the Neolithic revolution, as early as 10,000 BC (Okosun, 2009). While an exploration of the many early origins of social justice may be enticing to explore in some detail, it is not possible within the scope of this present study. Given the purpose of this present study, this brief history will begin within the context of a more relevant era and cultural context, that being the Western World.

In the Western world, the term social justice was first coined by the Italian philosopher Luigi Taparelli d'Azeglio in the 1840s (Novak, 2000). Taparelli spoke of social justice as a unified society in which all individuals are treated equally (Novak, 2000). This rather vague conception may account for the term being used in a multitude of ways in the century that followed (Okosun, 2009). During this time, several philosophers and scholars delved into discussions of social justice and its meaning (Novak, 2000). However, as Austrian philosopher Friedrich Hayek pointed out, entire books and treatises were written about social justice, with no single definition ever being produced or agreed upon (Hayek, 1944; Novak, 2000). It was in the latter half of the twentieth century, that social justice philosophies and social justice movements began to gain more widespread public attention. With the publication of political philosopher John Rawls' now classic text in 1971, *A Theory of Justice*, the social justice movement began to emerge more fully than it had in preceding decades (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Fraser, 2003). Rawls provided the first concrete definition of social justice – one that was clear

and accessible (Cochran-Smith, 2008). Rawls defined social justice as a system that adequately provides for those members who are in the most disadvantaged positions (Rawls, 1971). Rawls' focus was on the inequalities rooted in the socio-economic structure of society, including the economic marginalization and oppression of certain socio-economic classes and minority groups (Fraser, 2003). During this same era, the political and social climate of the 1960s and 1970s in general, created an essential backdrop for the philosophies of social justice to more fully emerge (Young, 1990). In the midst of this era of the civil rights movement, including second-wave feminism and the beginning of the struggle for gay and lesbian rights, the marginalization and oppression of minority groups was being publicly criticized and protested (Cochran-Smith, 2008). In both the public and academic spheres, people began to speak out against injustices.

Rawls' theory of justice, and those theories of a number of scholars who followed Rawls, centered around the concept of *distributive justice* (Christensen & Dorn, 1997; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Fraser, 2003; Gewirtz, 1998). Distributive justice is aimed at promoting an equalization of the distribution of goods and resources and aimed at promoting opportunities for all members of society. Distribution thus defined includes consideration of not only material goods but nonmaterial social goods, such as human rights and self-respect (North, 2006; Young, 1990). Working towards increasing the resources available to unprivileged populations is the central goal. Simply put, this type of justice is focused on "non-discrimination and equal opportunity to participate" (Kymlycka, 1995, p. 59). It is not surprising that in the wake of the American "separate but equal laws," (lasting until the 1950s), that distribution remained the dominant

paradigm of social justice theories. In fact, until recently, this notion was seen as tantamount with the term social justice itself (Boyles, Carusi, & Attick, 2009; Cochran-Smith, 2008).

Criticisms of the distributive view began to surface in the late 1970s, when the social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s began experiencing gains in public support and within governmental institutions (Owram, 1997). Social justice philosophers criticized distributive justice for its limited scope, and its failure to address the underlying issues that create inequity in distribution in the first place (Boyles et al., 2009; Coates, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Fraser, 1997; Gewirtz, 1998; Young, 1990). In fact, during this era of critique and unrest, it came to light that many individuals from marginalized groups felt that while equal opportunity was essential to their liberation, perhaps even more critical was the acknowledgement and respect of their unique social groups (Young, 1990). Furthermore, the concept of equal distribution itself is criticized for being patronizing and somewhat presumptuous in that one group assumes to know what is best for everybody (Cochran-Smith, 2008). Contrary to the greater goals of social justice, this presumption has been viewed as creating and contributing to oppression (Cochran-Smith, 2008). As a result, marginalized groups began to believe that any issue of justice needed to be more fully considered and critiqued through an examination of the fundamental relationships between individuals and groups within society rather than just being considered and based on difference of distribution alone.

The concept of justice as based on relationships is defined as *relational justice*. Relational justice is characterized as a system predicated on a positive and just set of relationships through which individuals develop their own fulfilled identities through

interaction with others (Christensen & Dorn, 1997; Gewirtz, 1998). Relational justice focuses mainly on the way in which people treat each other and the power relationships that tend to govern this (Christensen & Dorn, 1997; Gewirtz, 1998). The foundations of this view of social justice focus on social interactions and how to ameliorate the ways in which both individuals and groups cooperate and demonstrate respect (Coates, 2007). Theories of relational justice were formalized in the 1990s and have dominated philosophical debates about justice over the past two decades (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Fraser, 2003; Gewirtz, 1998; Honneth, 2003; Young, 1990).

Many relational justice philosophers have directed their focus to the more specific idea of recognition. Fraser (2003) identified the origin of recognition as having emerged from Hegelian philosophy with an emphasis on “an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each *sees* the other as equal.” (cited by North, 2006, p. 10). In other words, recognition transcends beyond individuals simply treating each other as equals and demands that individuals actually think of one another as equal. Stemming from the ideal of a reciprocal relationship between individuals, present-day theorists have emphasized that the key to developing the kind of relationships that are capable of working toward justice, are those in which individuals recognize and accept differences among and between individuals (Fraser, 1997; Young, 1990). As Young pointed out, leaders of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, made it clear that failure to recognize and respect unique social groups was a central dimension of injustice, and thus the goal of recognition has to be central to justice work. As a form of relational justice, recognition exemplifies the types of relationships that are advocated for by relational justice theorists. Furthermore, the theory of recognition finds developing positive

relationships to be an essential building block in working towards social justice (Fraser, 1997; Young, 1990).

Still, despite its popularity of late, relational justice is not without its critics. Honneth (2003), a visible opponent to the dominance of relational justice, contended that the growing disparity between rich and poor globally (and in developed countries) and the development of a new “underclass” in recent decades, one that lacks economic opportunity and social resources, are evidence that distributive justice should be given top priority. Honneth suggested that more is needed than mere moral and theoretical discussions of relational justice and that the more directed goals of distributive justice focus on the more-immediate provision of resources. The tensions between the two paradigms are ongoing and a source of heated debate.

While a substantial portion of current social justice literature continues to focus on the distributive/relational discussion, numerous social justice philosophers have emphasized the necessity for a more “all-encompassing” definition than what a distributive/relational dualism provides for (Fraser, 2003; Johnson, 2008; Jones, 2006). As a means to expand her own separated and narrowed views about the meaning of social justice, Nancy Fraser (2003) contended that relational justice and distributive justice can actually co-exist in unison if they are intricately joined in such a manner that one may not be achieved without the other. Thus, both must be addressed simultaneously, and definitions of social justice must encompass both. Resonant with this, Johnson (2008) discussed that the narrowing of social justice definitions can result in the “cherry-picking” of certain aspects and theories from within a body of literature that is undertaken to essentially validate one’s own values and beliefs. Furthermore, an over-focus on

attempting to secure one “true” definition of social justice may cause theorists to lose sight of the larger goal of creating of a more equitable society (Johnson, 2008, Jones, 2006). In essence, one cannot see the proverbial forest through the trees. Johnson (2008) and Jones (2006) both concluded that overtheorizing the term social justice and choosing overly specific definitions is counterproductive and suggested instead that scholars must acknowledge the complexity of our social world by incorporating many views of justice into our conceptualizations and we must adopt those definitions that are most appropriate to the social context.

A scholar within the field of social justice, T.Y. Okosun (2009), seems to heed the cautions of Fraser, Johnson and Jones, and recently defined social justice as a:

Voluntary and collaborative human response in terms of transformative actions to social issues which people perceive to dislocate social well being and the possibility of experiencing a full and productive social life...an advanced perception of a productive, democratic life, celebrated within the liberty to collaboratively act for each other, co-responsibly. (p. vii)

Herein, Okosun articulated the central meaning of social justice as the positive collaboration of a community of individuals (whether that be local or global), to work towards a society in which all persons are able to lead a fulfilled life. This definition will be used to inform the more contextualized examination of social justice within education, which will be explored next.

### **Social Justice in Education – What was? What is? What should be?**

Since the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the term social justice has appeared in numerous public texts and discourses throughout the field of education (North, 2006). Many conceptualizations of social justice within the field of education are similar to that of Okosun (Coates, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Goodman, 2000; North, 2006).

Educator and researcher, Dianne Goodman (2000) described the goal of social justice in education as something that must “create opportunities for people to reach their full potential within a mutually responsible, interdependent society...and that includes the full and equal participation of all groups in the society” (p. 4). Goodman’s view of social justice includes both physical and human aspects, and represents not only an ideal view of the world, but also outlines a view of social justice in education that is attainable by addressing the very foundations of social justice, as it is conceptualized in this present study, through the lens of mutual and interdependent relationships. This view, with its focus on the *kinds* of relationships that are foundational in the development of social justice, will be the one that will be employed to inform this present study.

There are a variety of ways in which educative communities have worked towards social justice. In the past decade, schools in particular, have focused on working toward equality within the schools themselves as a means to achieve social justice, including a focus on achieving equal opportunities and fair treatment for all members of educative communities (Boyles et al., 2009). Some examples of this will be discussed in this next section.

One approach to the development of fair and inclusive environments in educative communities is through visual representations of diversity (Cammarota & Romero, 2009). Schools may represent this by including food, artwork and student schedules that are representative of a diversified student body (Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Cochran-Smith, 2008). On a curricular level, school boards and individual schools have attempted to diversify their academic curriculum by including equal representations of a diverse

student body into academic subjects (Cochran-Smith, 2008). One example of this can be found in Canadian schools.

In Canadian schools, the inclusion of a mandatory Aboriginal People's unit to elementary and high schools' Eurocentric history curriculum represents one way that schools are promoting equality (Cochran-Smith, 2008). The inclusion of "ethnic" histories was put in place as one attempt at redistributing the focus of courses to be more inclusive (Cochran-Smith, 2008). However, as North (2006) pointed out, simply including ethnic histories into the curriculum often results in discourses that ignore minority confrontations with and resistance to inequities throughout time. In fact, the mandatory grade 10 Canadian history credit (the only mandatory history credit in Ontario secondary schools) requires that students only learn about traditional aboriginal cultures with no emphasis on discussions of cultural inequities and aboriginal resistance (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Thus, there is no required exploration of the systems that created inequity to begin with and additionally no required exploration of how relationships and discourse influence culture and impact issues of equality and justice.

In the United States, a more systemic example of an attempt to promote equality in schools is the 2001 initiative of *No Child Left Behind*, adopted in the United States in the past decade in an attempt to promote equality and fairness in the name of social justice (Garza, 2004; Leistyna, 2009). While the basic purpose of the initiative, "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to attain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (U.S. Congress, 2001), is fairly agreed upon, many educators and educational philosophers share the sentiment that this



only provides a surface solution, and that the fundamental way that people interact is what needs attention (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Garza, 2004; Meier & Wood, 2004).

In addition to working towards equality, many schools have concentrated on promoting multiculturalism by advocating for the tolerance and inclusion of all members of an educative community (Cochran-Smith, 2008; Theoharis, 2004). The concepts of both tolerance and inclusion represent a social, nonmaterial equalization of human rights and self-respect with a focus on trying to achieve “sameness” for all individuals (North, 2006). In both school board policies and individual teacher practices, the creation of spaces that are tolerant *of* difference and inclusive *in spite of* difference have been equated with the achievement of social justice (North, 2006).

Regardless of the prevalence and arguable importance of tolerance and inclusion, North (2006) and Lynch and Baker (2005) have suggested that the “seeking of sameness” that tolerance and inclusion ultimately strive for, does not address the harmful stereotypes that exist in schools. In addition, striving for sameness does not promote a celebration of difference and fails to confront the root of prejudices, those created by longstanding power imbalances and uneven relationships among groups and individuals (Cochran-Smith, 2008).

Cochran-Smith (2008) proposed that one alternative to striving for sameness is to concentrate on recognizing and respecting individuals’ unique strengths (Applebaum, 2008; Cochran-Smith, 2008). Every individual is unique (Applebaum, 2008). Applebaum (2008) and Goodman (2000) suggested that the incorporation of social justice in schools requires a celebration of individuals’ unique strengths and both students and teachers must work towards maximizing student potential based on those unique

strengths in order to promote a fair and equitable environment – one where all students can meet their full potential.

A number of other social justice theorists have supported a need, similar to Goodman's, calling for a restructuring of power relationships into mutual reciprocal relationships as a means to promote social justice in education (Fraser, 1997; Gewirtz, 1998; Goodman, 2000; North, 2006; Young, 1990). The concept of a mutual, reciprocal relationship is one whereby two individuals develop a relationship in which both sides give and receive and where the successes of one is connected to the successes of the other (Christensen & Dorn, 1997; Goodman, 2000; North, 2006). This type of relationship is one that emphasizes the mutuality and reciprocity of both peer relationships and the relationships between student and teacher – all have the potential to contribute to an environment of reciprocal learning and respect (Christensen & Dorn, 1997). The incorporation of social justice teaching and learning in schools is often referred to as social justice pedagogy. This concept will be explored next.

### **Social Justice Pedagogy – What should Work, What has Worked**

Educational communities can promote social justice on both a macro level and a micro level. Social justice on a macro level includes school and school board-wide discourses, and the types of large-scale transitions in teacher and learner thinking that were discussed in the previous section (Cochran-Smith, 2008; North, 2006). Contrarily, at the micro level, social justice is promoted in individual classrooms and learning groups through a process of social justice pedagogy (Applebaum, 2008; Leistyna, 2009). Social justice pedagogues are educators who work to reduce and abolish the inequities of society through their teaching practices (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005). In the following section,

I will first examine the importance of incorporating social justice pedagogy into educational environments. Next, I will examine some theories about possible ways to include social justice pedagogy in teaching practices. Finally, I will use empirical evidence to explore some of the ways that educators have successfully done this.

It has been suggested that incorporating social justice pedagogy into educational environments can be used as a vehicle that leads to change within society as a whole (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2005). In fact, several educational philosophers have predicted that the use of social justice pedagogy will help create actively engaged citizens and will instill in students the passion and knowledge to rectify the many social injustices that exist within present-day society (Lechuga, Clerc, & Howell, 2009; van Gorder, 2007). Swartz (2005) suggested that social justice pedagogy provides students with the dispositions and epistemologies that are required for change to take place. Resonant with this, a quantitative study by Nagda, Gurin and Lopez (2003) surveyed 203 secondary students who were taught a social justice curriculum. Study results suggested that the completion of this social justice-focused course increased students' desire to engage in civic activism and shifted student orientation away from passively placing blame toward personal action (Nagda et al., 2003). A similar study was completed by Mayhew and Fernandez (2007) and examined the outcomes of social justice pedagogy in five university level courses. This quantitative study measured the attitudes of 423 male and female students using the "Measure of Classroom Moral Practices" scale developed by Mayhew (2005) at the beginning and end of a university semester (Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007). The overall outcome of the study concluded that there was a

significant increase in student attitudes and understandings of their own responsibility for contributing to the betterment of humanity (Mayhew & Fernandez, 2007).

In addition to the changes in student attitudes and dispositions, social justice pedagogy can have multiple academic and behavioural benefits for students including increased academic performance and a greater sense of self worth (Dover, 2009). A comprehensive meta-analysis completed by Dover (2009) summarized the findings of over 30 empirical studies that were conducted throughout the United States, measuring the outcomes of social justice pedagogy at the K-12 level. Using the qualitative and quantitative data from those studies, Dover made the substantive conclusion that in addition to bolstering academic success, incorporating social justice pedagogy in elementary and middle school curriculum can provide students with increased confidence and the motivation to engage in civic activism (Dover, 2009). Furthermore, several of the individual studies in the meta-analysis reported that incorporating social justice pedagogy into the classroom and school environment significantly affected the graduation rate of “at-risk” students (Dover, 2009), increasing it substantively. Although certain studies were unable to isolate the specific academic outcomes, the overwhelming conclusion was that incorporating social justice learning into the classroom curriculum contributed to academic, attitudinal and behavioural outcomes, including most prevalently, increased motivation and engagement (Dover, 2009). Both theoretically and empirically, social justice pedagogy has been deemed to be important. To find the most successful ways of teaching using social justice pedagogy, educators and researchers have examined several different methods. Methods of social justice pedagogy will be explored next.

As mentioned above, the concepts of tolerance and inclusion are very prevalent in social justice pedagogy (Artiles, Harris-Murri, & Rostenberg, 2006). In recent decades, social justice pedagogy has focused on teaching the principles of tolerance and inclusion as a means to encourage students to promote fairness and equality in school and in their lives (Coates, 2004). However, the tendency of educators to focus solely on the ideas of tolerance and inclusion raises numerous criticisms. The aforementioned arguments of both Cochran-Smith (2008) and Lynch and Baker (2005), contended that an exclusive concentration on tolerance and inclusion within schools does not confront the harmful stereotypes and root of the prejudices.

Social justice theorists, Cammarota and Romero (2009), proposed a potential alternative to discussions of tolerance and inclusion, one that is reminiscent of Goodman's (2000) conception of social justice that is focused more on the foundation of relationships. Cammarota and Romero focused on the elements of compassion, cooperation, and consciousness of both local and global communities. Oftentimes, the elements of compassion, cooperation and consciousness are not seen as related to helping students learn about the more direct and obvious manifestations of social justice. Rather, discussions of racism, sexism, and classism, among others, appear to be the predominant classroom discourses (Goodman, 2000; North, 2006). However, Cammarota and Romero maintained that in order to address what Fraser (2003) and Cochran-Smith (2008) deemed to be the root of social injustice, which is the way people think about and relate to each other, social justice pedagogues need to focus on encouraging students to exercise compassion and cooperation with others and be critically conscious of the structures in place (Cammarota & Romero, 2009).

This concept of critical consciousness was first proposed over 40 years ago by Brazilian adult educator and educational philosopher, Paulo Freire. Freire (1970) proposed that critical consciousness is a state of in-depth reflexivity and coming to understand the world. The development of a critical consciousness, or what Freire referred to as *conscientization*, can serve as a means for people to free themselves and others from oppressive conditions (Freire, 1970). Freire contended that we must lift ourselves from defeat and naivety, into a space of hope and reason in order to change our consciousness and overcome injustice (Freire, 1970; Van Gorder, 2007). For Freire, the way to accomplish this is by helping students to be critically reflective of themselves, their place in society and of society as a whole (Deans, 1999). When students achieve a critical consciousness, they will be able to act as agents of change and work to correct the injustices of the world (Deans, 1999).

While acknowledging that the development of a critical consciousness may exist as a viable means to achieve social justice, the question remains: how do we go about educating for critical conscious? Dover (2009), Leistyna (2009) and Yang (2009) all argued that the first step in any social justice pedagogical practice is to create student communities (both in and out of the classroom) where this learning can happen. For Dover, Leistyna and Yang, this means working in smaller groups, like a secondary school class, or even smaller groups in the form of clubs and student interest groups. This allows for individual voices to be heard, and for students to acknowledge and discuss with their group the relevant issues that are affecting them, identifying those they seek to change (Yang, 2009).

Additionally, there are many educators and philosophers that have found that an effective way to promote social justice learning is to encourage activism. To promote activism, educators can explicitly discuss examples of social engagement and youth action, in both a current context and an historical one (Dover, 2009; Leistyna, 2009; Yang, 2009). Perhaps even more significantly, students can engage in social action projects (Breunig, 2009). While theories of social justice pedagogy are important, so too are the findings from empirical studies related to outcomes of employing social justice pedagogy. There have been numerous studies conducted that have empirically examined the best ways to approach social justice pedagogy. Several recent studies have focused on the use of experiential education philosophies and methods to teach students using social justice pedagogy. The method of experiential education – the use of direct experience as a means to teach social justice to students - was effectively employed at the Putney Graduate School for Teacher Education as early as 1950 (Rodgers, 2006). The Putney School had, as its overarching tenet, a commitment to change the world and was founded on the belief that using direct experiences to teach was the most successful way to achieve positive change. Rodgers (2006) used the journals from several of the past students of the Putney School to examine students' impressions of the effectiveness of the school to fulfill its tenet. Several students credited the direct experience of working on community projects in impoverished neighbourhoods, facilitated by the school, as a successful example of social justice pedagogy. One student referred to his experience working on a community project nearly 50 years later, commenting that “no amount of reading could leave such an impression...If a picture is really worth a thousand words, then an experience is worth a thousand books” (Rogers, 2006, p. 1286). This recollection

attests to both the immediate power and lasting effect of using direct experience to teach social justice. The use of experience in social justice pedagogy was also examined by teacher and educational researcher Fred Glennon (2004), who conducted a qualitative study examining the success of using direct experience to teach a social justice curriculum at in a senior high school class. Glennon reported that 51 of 60 students (85%) demonstrated increased engagement and understanding of social justice concepts when taught using direct experience in the form of a social justice action project in their community. Furthermore, the process of students reflecting on their individual experiences was very influential in helping students grasp the concept of social justice (Glennon, 2004).

More recently, Cook-Sather and Youens (2007) conducted a descriptive analysis of two projects in the United States and the United Kingdom that successfully incorporated two important elements of experiential education philosophy; relevance and responsibility. Both the Teaching and Learning Together Project (TLT) and the Pupil Mentoring Project (PMP) provided students with the capacity to work towards a more equitable society in a way that was personally meaningful to each student (Cook-Sather & Youens, 2007). These programs provide evidence of the potential for this form of pedagogy to motivate students to not only engage in social justice activism, but to engage in the overall learning process as a result of purposeful social justice teaching and learning (Cook-Sather & Youens, 2007). The practice of using relevance and responsibility in teaching was additionally studied by educator Julio Cammarota (2007). Cammarota conducted in depth interviews with three students of a specialized Social Justice Education program (SJEP) in a United States secondary school. All three students



stated that when the subject matter was more relevant to them, they were more engaged with social justice material, and felt they experienced greater overall academic success, including an increased sense of motivation to graduate (Cammarota, 2007). Additionally, the students referred to the fact that they felt an increased level of responsibility about choosing their projects and creating their own deadlines, both of these served as contributing factors to their success within the SJEP (Cammarota, 2007).

While the above studies have found that social justice can be promoted in a variety of ways, I return now to Goodman's (2000) view of social justice in education; one in which social justice is attainable by first addressing the very foundations of relational justice, relationships. A study by Buote and Berglund (2010) examined the development of social justice by adopting this same view. Buote and Berglund examined the "Respectful Relationships" program, a youth program that focuses on developing positive relationships and social competencies that underlie social justice. This study involved 1582 student at 31 schools where the "Respectful Relationships" program was implemented. Students completed Likert-type pre- and post- tests, self-reporting on the following: social justice; social responsibility; positive identity; empathy; supportive school-based adult relationships; self-awareness; communication skills; discomfort seeing others being picked on; equal rights for all; and seeing people for who they are on the inside and speaking up when something bothers self. In every area, the students rated themselves higher on the Likert-type scale after the program was complete. Buote and Berglund concluded that the program was successful in developing healthy relationships among youth, and that there was a positive correlation with the development of these healthy relationships, and social justice orientation in youth. This study supports the

theories of the many aforementioned theorists that proposed that the fundamental way that people interact with one another and see each other is an important foundation of working towards social justice (Cochran-Smith, 2005; Garza, 2004; Meier & Wood, 2004; North, 2006).

As the above review of relevant literature of social justice pedagogy, social justice within education and the concept of social justice itself has outlined, the term social justice can, and has been used, in a variety of ways and across a variety of contexts. The present study is focused on examining the development of social justice in the particular setting of outdoor education. However, before initiating a discussion of the intersection of social justice and outdoor education, the concept of experiential education, the philosophy that guides outdoor education, will first be examined.

### **Experiential Education**

As discussed above, social justice is a prevalent topic in education. This section is aimed at exploring how this topic intersects with a specific form of education – outdoor education. However to do this, I must first provide a background of the umbrella philosophy under which outdoor education falls – experiential education. I will then outline the development of outdoor education and wilderness programs more specifically.

Experiential education is “a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (Association for Experiential Education, 2012). As a form of alternative education, experiential education is often proposed as an alternative option in the face of the many of the aforementioned criticisms

surrounding traditional education (Itin, 1999; Lindsay & Ewert, 1999). The concern for the lack of moral education and the failure of mainstream education to educate the entire individual are specifically addressed by experiential educators (Lindsay & Ewert, 1999). The following section will outline the foundations and competing philosophies surrounding experiential education.

**Historical foundations of experiential education.** Similar to the history of alternative education, experiential education has a long history – one that has involved great philosophical debate (Miles & Priest, 1999). The popularity of experiential education as a philosophical movement has ebbed and flowed as part of this history. Over time and in general, education has been influenced by a “pendulum” of teaching philosophies and methods that have and have not valued the significance of experience as a pedagogical tool (Miles & Priest, 1999). This “pendulum” effect has accounted for the rise and fall in the recognition of experiential education as a viable pedagogy across various periods in history (Miles & Priest, 1999).

As far back as 370 B.C., several schools of thought and individuals discussed experiential and justice-oriented philosophies of education as previously mentioned (Murphy, 2006). For example, the concept of moral education was discussed by the Chinese philosopher Confucius in 500 B.C. and the Greek philosopher Plato in 370 B.C. Both philosophers, from their two distinct cultures, conceptualized education as a means for individuals to grow and develop moral character as a means to “do good” by themselves and their state (Murphy, 2006). Both Confucius and Plato shared the belief that moral education was an essential part of any complete education, although this was

not yet explicitly tied to the use of direct experience to learn or seen as a part of a larger educational philosophy (Murphy, 2006).

Despite a lack of explicit connection, as previously discussed, the concepts of using both direct experience and moral education to learn contributed significantly to early educational philosophies during these early periods. However, true to the “pendulum” effect of teaching philosophies, experiential philosophies fell out of favour, only to briefly re-emerge at certain points over the course of the next two millennia (Miles & Priest, 1999). In the early 1900’s, philosophies of experiential education once again gained prominence (Murphy, 2006). It was during this era that the philosophies of experiential education were formalized (Breunig, 2008; Murphy, 2006). The early 1990s and the aforementioned Progressive movement were arguably the most revolutionary period for experiential education and perhaps for present conceptions of education in general (Zilversmit, 1993). Although many philosophers, theorists, and educators contributed to the concept of experiential education during this period, most current educational philosophers and experiential education practitioners argue that John Dewey in particular, was the most influential figure of this movement, and of experiential education itself. In fact, Dewey has even been labeled as the founder and the “grandfather” of experiential education (Breunig, 2008; Kolb, 1984; Rubin, 2000; Seaman, 2008). Similarly to alternative education, Dewey’s vision of experiential education was a form of education that was child-centered, and focused on creating a comprehensive system for the development of the “whole” child (Breunig, 2008; Zilversmit, 1993). Dewey drew many of his thoughts about teaching and learning from educational philosophers of the Enlightenment period (the early 1700s), including Jean-

Jacques Rousseau and John Locke both of whom encouraged the process of child-centred learning (Dewey, 1938; Murphy, 2006). Moreover, Dewey theorized that education could have larger goals, beyond reading, writing, and arithmetic (Itin, 1999). For Dewey, the greatest philosophical goal of education was the promotion of a democratic society with an educated citizenry, one that would work towards positive social change (Itin, 1999). This particular view on what education should be and what it should accomplish represented a monumental change from most other education philosophies of the era, and it seemed to take the educational community a good portion of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century to theoretically process (Murphy, 2006). However, by the 1980s and 1990s, educational theorists appeared ready and willing to further investigate and expand upon Dewey's philosophy of experiential education.

**Present-day definitions of experiential education.** Concurrent with the aforementioned resurgence of alternative education philosophies in the 1980s and 1990s, many educational philosophers and researchers became interested in the field of experiential education and began to work towards conceptualizing this educational philosophy in the context of the current era (Carver, 1996; DeLay, 1996; Ewert, 1999; Itin, 1999; Joplin, 1981; Luckman, 1996; Wurdinger, 1996). Although many of the philosophical foundations of experiential education remained similar to Dewey's formation, educational theorists of the 80s and 90s directed more of their focus to the *processes* and *practices* of experiential education. Discussions of individualized, student centred learning lie at the centre of the experiential education literature from this period (Carver, 1996; DeLay, 1996; Ewert, 1999; Joplin, 1981; Wurdinger, 1996). According to Ewert (1999), experiential education heeds the individual needs, interests and strengths of

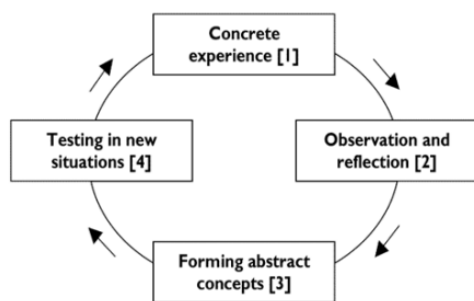
students, and creates learning that will best fit each student. Wurdinger (1996) and DeLay (1996) are of a similar opinion and supported this by exploring the individualized perception of experience. According to these theorists, individualized learning, combined with the use of direct experience to promote learning (a theme that has remained central to the philosophy of experiential education since Dewey coined the term), provide experiential educators and theorists with a platform for educating in a manner that emphasizes the importance of students' different perceptions of their own experiences and thus promoting individualized learning (Association for Experiential Education, 2009; DeLay, 1996; Wurdinger, 1996). This focus on individual differences in perception and the unique learning of each student can be further promoted through reflecting on learning experiences (DeLay, 1996; Luckman, 1996; Wurdinger, 1996).

A similar focus on the reflective process is also an essential element of experiential education theory and practice (Joplin, 1981). Individual reflection on the experience, upon the learning and upon the unique changes in the student all provide a means to incorporate new and enhanced learning into the student's life and provides the basis for how experience can be translated into revelation (Joplin, 1981; Luckman, 1996). Overall, the individualized processes of learning through direct experience remained the focus of the educational theorists of the 1980s and 1990s. The new directions explored by these theorists demonstrated that experiential education focused on both the journey (process) and the destination (product) of learning (Luckman, 1996; Raffan, 1995). Dewey's philosophy of experiential education remained at the centre of much of this discussion.

Another of Dewey's philosophies of experiential education that was further explored by experiential education theorists in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was the holistic education of the individual (Carver, 1996; Joplin, 1981). Holistic education focuses on the potential for education to be employed as a means to promote positive growth of students mentally, physically, emotionally and socially, and as entire organisms (Dewey, 1938; Murphy, 2006). Both Carver (1996) and Joplin (1981) asserted the centrality of the holistic development of students in any theory of experiential education.

These theories of experiential education from the 1990s are still present in current definitions of experiential education. As mentioned above, the most recent definition put forth by The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) currently proposes that "experiential education is a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities" (Association for Experiential Education, 2012). In this definition, the concepts discussed by theorists in the 1990s, of individualized learning, immersion in direct experience, self-reflection and the process of experiential education as a journey and a destination are all present. There appears to be some focus on both experiential education as philosophy with a focus on purposeful, values-oriented content but also a focus on experiential education as methodology (i.e. a focus on the process of educating experientially). For the purposes of this present review of relevant literature, an examination of experiential learning will next be explored followed by a more complete explanation of the difference between experiential learning and experiential education.

**Experiential learning.** Experiential learning, which is often used synonymously with the term experiential education, is actually a component of the larger concept with a particular focus on methodology (Itin, 1999; Rubin, 2000). Itin (1999) provided a helpful basis from which to compare learning and education in stating that learning is a “process of change within an individual” whereas education refers to a “transitive process between and educator and student” (p. 91). More specifically, experiential learning involves the change in an individual that results from the reflection on a direct experience as one part of the learning process. In 1984, David Kolb created a model of the process of experiential learning, which is still widely used today (see Figure 1) (Breunig, 2008). Kolb credited Dewey, as well as Lewin and Piaget for providing the theoretical underpinnings for this model. Kolb’s model emphasizes the four separate steps of experiential learning: “(a) active student involvement in a meaningful and challenging experience, (b) reflection upon the experience individually and in a group, (c) the development of new knowledge about the world, and (d) application of this knowledge to a new situation” (Knapp, 1992, p. 36-37, cited by Breunig, 2005, p. 79).



*Figure 1.* Experiential learning cycle. Adapted from “Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development” by D. Kolb, 1984. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.



For example, when an individual learns the proper strokes in a canoe, they typically undergo all four phases of experiential learning. First, the individual will take a stroke (a), and attempt to move the canoe in a straight line. Second, the individual will reflect on the success or failure of that stroke (b), to understand why the stroke did or did not achieve the desired outcome. Third, the individual will use the knowledge gained through reflection and relevant theory to conceptualize how they will complete their next stroke (c). Fourth, the individual will physically take the stroke that they have conceptualized (d), thus completing the cycle. This cycle can and has been applied in many different settings, including classroom learning. Although outdoor activities might demonstrate a way to use experiential learning, the process of experiential learning can also occur in more formal education settings, for example, a classroom.

In fact, several researchers have examined the effectiveness of experiential learning. Amongst these researchers is David Kolb himself. A study completed by Mainemelis, Boyatzis and Kolb in 2002 measured learning outcomes of teaching to both standardized learning styles and specialized experiential learning styles of 198 male and female university students. Mainemelis, Boyatzis and Kolb concluded that teaching that employed the experiential learning style lead to higher interpersonal skill development in both males and females. Furthermore, experiential learning-focused teaching more effectively addressed the variety of learning styles of the various learners within the classroom than did mainstream education (Mainemelis, Boyatzis, & Kolb, 2002). In a similar vein, Mok (1999) completed a direct comparison of the effectiveness of both experiential learning and more mainstream textbook learning in ten separate areas (experiencing, reflection, constructing meaning from experiencing, feelings, perception

of values and social and cultural influences, aspiration for the betterment of society, personal autonomy in learning, motivation, subject learning, and learning skills) in a first-year university class. In all ten areas, experiential learning proved to increase student interest, skill and capability, more so than textbook learning (Mok, 1999).

Although Kolb's model provides the basis for much of the literature on experiential learning, it has come under some critique (Illeris, 2007; Miettinen, 2000; Seaman, 2008). Illeris (2007) suggested that Kolb's view that all learning is experiential learning is too broad and trivializes the importance of working towards an increase in the manner in which experiential learning is defined and conceived. Illeris recommended more distinct categorization of differing forms of education, whereby there are more definite guidelines for distinguishing experiential learning from other forms of learning. Miettinen (2000) also criticized Kolb's model as placing too little emphasis on the reflection phase. He alluded that reflection is the largest and most transformative part of the process, and this is not adequately depicted by Kolb's present model. Miettinen further suggested that the inadequate emphasis of the reflective process may hinder the way that experiential education is facilitated. However, while both Illeris and Miettinen have criticized Kolb's model, neither have proposed a revised model. Seaman (2008) has more recently added to the criticisms of Kolb's model. Seaman described that the existing cyclic model of experiential learning does not work as an active theory of learning. He found that progressing through the sequential steps of the cycle does not accurately reflect the real process of experiential learning, and proposed that Kolb's model be valued instead as an important historical contribution.

These definitions of experiential learning and experiential education indicate some of the differentiation between these two terms. Further to that discussion, I wish again to emphasize that experiential learning is an important component of the overall concept of experiential education, but is regarded as more of a methodology than philosophy, at least by the theorists cited above and in its present day conception. Thus, experiential learning and experiential education can no longer be used interchangeably as they once were. For the remainder of the paper, it should be noted that any reference to experiential education incorporates the process of experiential learning as one component of enacting the broader purposes of experiential education philosophy, which can include an emphasis on values education, play with purpose, as well as using team building and the development of sense of community to work toward issues of social justice. The many purposes of experiential education philosophy appear to have generated a variety of experiential education “subfields.” A concrete list and discussion of all of the “subfields” or branches of experiential education would be difficult to include here, however, a review of the past five years of the Journal of Experiential Education has revealed that the most oft discussed and cited branches include integrated programs, cooperative education, service learning and outdoor education. For the purpose of this present study, the branch of outdoor education will be further examined and explored next.

### **Outdoor Education**

Early in the development of outdoor education, Donaldson and Donaldson (1958) described outdoor education as education in, about, and for the outdoors, where an outdoor environment provides the setting for direct learning through experiences that will foster skills and attitudes about the outdoors that will contribute to its protection

(Donaldson & Donaldson, 1958; Ibrahim & Cordes, 2002). Donaldson and Donaldson's now classic definition, echoed by Ibrahim and Cordes (2002) over 40 years later, focuses on the importance of learning about the outdoors in an effort to foster a sense of environmental stewardship. However, while learning about the environment is an important aspect to outdoor education, there are also several other important components (Boss, 1999). Outdoor education also uses outdoor environments to offer direct experiences where the possibility of relevant learning in many different areas can happen (Boss, 1999).

Karen Warren (2005), a prominent outdoor educator and educational theorist further defined outdoor education as “educational situations that take place in a wilderness/outdoor setting and have an element of adventure or challenge used as a method to educate through direct experience” (p. 89). While these, and many other definitions of outdoor education, focus on physically being in the outdoors, Miles and Priest (1999) suggested that outdoor education can take place in classroom settings indoors. However, as Louv (2005) argued, in his seminal book *Last Child in the Woods*, the amount of time spent in the outdoors is directly correlated to children's physical and emotional connection to outdoor environments. Thus, a fostering of stewardship and education for the outdoors is more effective in outdoor environments. Louv coined the term “nature deficit disorder” to describe how those children who have had very little connection to the outdoors often experience, as a result, behavioural disorders, depression, and obesity. Louv prescribed outdoor experience and education as a means to foster happy, healthy, engaged children and youth.

Outdoor education is also valued for its ability to promote the philosophies of experiential education with its emphasis on using the outdoor setting as a site to promote physical and mental learning through the challenges that often get presented in that learning context (e.g. the rigour of having to portage a canoe) (Moote & Wodarski, 1997; Warren, 2005). DeGraff and Ashby (1996) found that experiential activities in and about the outdoors provided additional benefits such as “active involvement, high levels of engagement, cooperative opportunities, shared experience, accelerated intimacy, [and] environmental factors” (p. 90). Thus, the outdoors can be used to promote many different types of learning.

One world-renowned organization dedicated to outdoor education is Outward Bound. The first Outward Bound School was founded by Kurt Hahn in 1941 in Britain (Warren, 2005). Originally, Outward Bound was focused on using the outdoors as a classroom to teach physical fitness, craftsmanship, self-reliance and compassion (Goldenberg, McAvoy, & Klenosky, 2005). Today, Outward Bound maintains this primary focus throughout its many international locations, and, in many ways, has set an industry standard of best practice for outdoor education programs throughout the world (Hattie, Marsh, Neill, & Richards, 1997). Hattie et al. (1997) suggested that Outward Bound provides a model for outdoor education programs, based on six essential elements: “(a) wilderness or backcountry settings; (b) a small group (usually less than 16); (c) assignment of a variety of mentally and/or physically challenging objectives, such as mastering a river rapid or hiking to a specific point; (d) frequent and intense interactions that usually involve group problem solving and decision making; (e) a nonintrusive, trained leader; and (f) a duration of 2 to 4 weeks” (p. 44).

Another internationally recognized outdoor education provider that has helped set industry standards is the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). NOLS was founded in 1965 by Paul Petzoldt and provides outdoor and wilderness experiences for students as a means to teach technical outdoor skills, leadership and environmental ethics (Sibthorp, Paisley, & Gookin, 2007). Similar to Outward Bound, NOLS takes small groups of students into remote areas and uses these locations to reach learning goals experientially (Sibthorp, Paisley, & Gookin, 2007). The wilderness experiences are often focused on hiking, boating, rock climbing, mountaineering or skiing (NOLS, 2012).

While Outward Bound and NOLS represent two of the larger and more influential outdoor education organizations, outdoor education programs are also offered by many smaller organizations, and the philosophies of outdoor education are used in a multiplicity of ways. Using the above model provided by Hattie et al., several different varieties of outdoor education can be conceptualized. These include, but are not limited to, environmental education, K-12 school initiatives, outdoor education centres, adventure education, adventure therapy and wilderness experience. Although one could spend a significant amount of time examining each of these offshoots in depth, for the purpose of the present study, wilderness experience will be the focus of a more in-depth examination.

### **Wilderness Programs**

Gager, Hendee, Kinziger and Krumpe (1998) defined wilderness programs as an organized immersion into wilderness settings for purposes of “personal growth, therapy, education or group development” (p. 2). Wilderness was defined by the Wilderness Act in 1964 as an area with a high degree of naturalness that creates the opportunity for

solitude. In many facets of society, including art, literature, medicine, and education, wilderness has been depicted as a place of natural beauty, untouched by man, capable of inspiring, healing, and challenging (Gager et al., 1998). The idea of challenge specifically, is one that has been investigated in outdoor education literature.

Borrie and Birzell (2001) recently used this idea of the physical and emotional challenges that can occur in wilderness settings to further characterize wilderness programs. Both physical and emotional challenges are often sequenced in an increasingly complex order, where the mastery of one challenge leads to a new, more difficult challenge (Hattie et al., 1997). A quantitative study by Paxton and McAvoy (2000) examining 68 students on a 21-day wilderness program, uncovered that facilitating increasingly difficult challenges, (e.g. starting with an easy whitewater section and moving to more difficult sections) was most effective for participant emotional, physical and cognitive growth. Participant growth and additional benefits of wilderness programs will be explored next.

The benefits of outdoor education through wilderness programs are well documented. For decades, researchers have been interested in understanding what happens during these programs and what aspects of the program and lessons learned students bring back to their daily lives (Ewert, 1983). Martin and Priest (1986) described the general outcomes of adventure education in wilderness contexts as both personal growth and group development. Hattie et al. (1997) expanded on the outcome of personal growth in a seminal meta-analysis that summarized findings from 96 studies on acquired life skills on a variety of Outward Bound programs over the course of 30 years. This meta-analysis reported that one of the outcomes of adventure education in

wilderness contexts was an increase in an individual's perception of their level of self-control (Hattie et al., 1997). More specifically, self-control can include, but is not limited to, independence, confidence, self-efficacy, self-understanding, assertiveness, decision-making, emotional intelligence, and increased benevolence (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Ewert, 1983; Hattie et al., 1997). Martin (2001) supported this particular (increase in self control) conclusion in his study that examined the benefits of both 22 and nine-day wilderness-focused Outward Bound programs in 150 participants. Martin found an increase in participant relationship with self, including increased self-confidence.

Several more recent studies have supported similar findings to those from previous studies, identifying significant increases in participants' self-concept, self-esteem and self-efficacy in a wide variety of outdoor education programs, many of which were wilderness experience programs (Larson, 2007; Paisley, Furman, Sibthorp, & Gookin, 2008; Sheard & Golby, 2006). While these benefits are well documented, Ewert (1983) asserted that "the how" about how this learning is achieved on wilderness experience programs represents a black box of sorts, given that there is research yet to be conducted that explores what conditions lead to the aforementioned benefits. Over 25 years later, this is still the case (Shellman, 2009).

While studies on the benefits of outdoor education abound, Ewert et al. (2000) also found that, in addition to the lack of empirical evidence related to "how" these benefits have been brought about, there is also a lack of research on the lived experience of students on wilderness experience programs. Furthermore, there have been numerous studies on the benefits of outdoor education programs of large organizations like Outward



Bound and NOLS, yet there are very few studies that focus on the hundreds of smaller companies that run similar programs.

### **The Intersection of Social Justice and Wilderness Programs**

At several points throughout this review of relevant literature, the linkages of social justice to experiential education and outdoor education, more specifically wilderness experience programs, have surfaced. This section will provide a more thorough analysis of the intersection of outdoor/wilderness forms of experiential education with social justice and will examine how both forms of pedagogy focus on using education as a means to work toward a more just society.

**Social justice in experiential education.** At its core, experiential education advocates for social change (Itin, 1999). Even in its fledgling state, Dewey placed a strong emphasis on using education as a means to correct injustices (Dewey, 1938; Warren, 2005). Dewey emphasized two primary goals of education (a) what and how students learn and (b) what students do with that learning (Dewey, 1938; Estes, 2004; Raffan, 1995). For Dewey, education was a means to both prepare an individual to become an active member in a community and as a means to educate those individuals to participate in a democratic society (Itin, 1999). Viewed through this lens, the concept of experiential education as more than just a process of learning becomes truly evident. The philosophy of experiential education both promotes and explores the values and morals of society (Itin, 1999).

Another influential supporter of experiential education as a means to achieve social justice was the aforementioned Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) advocated for a philosophy of education that

emphasized a mutual relationship between student and teacher, one that seeks to end the dominant “banking model of education” whereby students are open repositories to whatever knowledge a teacher happens to deposit on any given day. For Freire, the way to counter this “banking model” is to facilitate bi-directional learning through experience where the learner is sometimes the teacher and the teacher is sometimes the learner.

Freire referred to this as liberatory pedagogy and both the student/teacher and teacher/student were engaged in a transactional educative process. Freire believed that education could be used as a means to consciously shape an individual and that individual’s community, as well as society as a whole (Freire, 1970).

Ultimately, experiential educators, including Dewey and Freire, view education as a “process that cannot be separated from the larger issues of a person in a socio-political environment” (Itin, 1999, p. 93). In this conceptualization, experiential education has the ability to transform education into a system that works towards the creation of citizens dedicated to creating a just and compassionate society. More recently, experiential education has been connected to the development of reciprocal relationships between student and teacher (Rubin, 2000). In a theoretical article, Rubin (2000) suggested that the successful implementation of experiential education creates an environment where the relationships between the student and the teacher are mutually beneficial, and both learning and teaching are the responsibility of both student and teacher, similar to Freire’s assertions about this. Thus, teaching that applies the philosophies of experiential education has the potential to develop the type of relationships that are foundational in developing social justice, as conceived in this present study.

Consequently, not only does experiential education have the capacity to enhance students' learning about the type of relationships required to promote social justice, but the values of social justice pedagogy itself can enhance the effectiveness of experiential education, through a focus on experiential education as purposeful philosophy. The relationship between the two theories is bi-directional and mutually enhancing when regarded in this light.

**Social justice in outdoor education and wilderness programs.** Outdoor education, and wilderness experiences specifically, have additional unique elements that intersect with the meanings and processes of social justice learning. Here, again, I return to the founder of Outward Bound, Kurt Hahn. Hahn created a legacy of outdoor learning that was built on several of the essential components of social justice, and resonant with Dewey, valued education as a means to create compassionate, democratic citizens (Warren, 2005). Hahn lived during an era where there were unspeakable social and political injustices perpetrated by the Nazi regime in Germany, where he was living at the time. As a result of his bearing witness to many of these injustices, Hahn set out to create an educational system that would work towards rectifying the degeneration of the global community (Warren, 2005). Using the wilderness as the site for learning, Outward Bound schools supported the idea of employing practical physical tasks for the purpose of teaching and learning a variety of skills, including interpersonal skills and personal growth and development (Gager et al., 1998; Hattie et al., 1997). The goal was to use this educational opportunity to promote values, morality and responsibility (Warren, 2005). Clearly, the larger goals of Hahn's conception of education, those used to form the basis of Outward Bound and many other wilderness experience programs, mirrored

those of Dewey, and would in time be mirrored by Freire and other social justice advocates.

More recently, Warren (1998, 2002, 2005) explicitly outlined the parallels of outdoor education and social justice, and discussed both the barriers to teaching for and about social justice in the fields of experiential education while simultaneously encouraging the development of more socially just practices. Warren is a scholar committed to understanding the direct connection and development of social justice in outdoor education. Warren (2005) expressed how the use of particular processes in outdoor education makes it a good methodological fit for social justice learning. Yet, despite this, integration of social justice teaching within this field is far from adequate. Warren's concern about the lack of explicit social justice teaching and learning in outdoor education is a legitimate one and the call for a focus on more socially just theory and practices is well founded. However, while Warren may find the current practices of tolerance and inclusion to be lacking, recent decades have seen an overall increase in specialized outdoor education programs that acknowledge and celebrate issues of diversity. These include, but are not limited to programs that are more accessible to women, programs specific to people with disabilities, and programs catering to Native populations (Breunig, 2008; Gillis, 1992; Roberts 1996; Warren, 1999). Some of the most prominent specialized programs are those that focus on populations of youth-at-risk and youth generally. Programs, including Project DARE (Development through Adventure, Responsibility, and Education), have been developed exclusively to provide at-risk youth and youth in the criminal justice system with an alternative lifestyle. The program's focus prompts adolescents to "try another way" (Project DARE, 2009). A

quantitative study conducted by Russell (2004) on the effects of a Project DARE wilderness program, involving 125 participants, revealed that participants perceived a development in both their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, including increased tolerance of others and increased success in group living. Furthermore, many of the program participants felt they had a greater level of control over their lives (Russell, 2004).

Separately, organizations such as Wilderness Inquiry (WI) run inclusive programs in which people from a wide range of race, class, age, gender and ability join together in an outdoor setting to experience the wilderness as an integrated group (Sugerman, 2001). This type of program promotes social justice through the formation of a community of many different individuals and helps to break through some of the many social barriers which contribute to the obstruction of justice specifically related to ability (Anderson, Schleien, McAvoy, Lias, & Seligmann, 1997). Inclusive programs represent the type of shift that Warren calls for within the outdoor education and wilderness experience communities. However, while this represents a step in the right direction in working towards social justice through increased tolerance and inclusion, I think that, as in other forms of education, these “too few” examples provide only a surface solution.

Several other researchers have examined the ability of outdoor education and wilderness programs and the ways in which they contribute to positive relationship development (McKenzie & Blenkinsop, 2006; Mitten, 1994; Sharpe, 2005). Martin and Priest (1986) claimed that the *fundamental topic* of outdoor education is relationships, relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with nature. I will next explore the

benefits of outdoor education and wilderness experience on individuals' relationships with others in order to further focus this discussion on the topic of this present study.

McKenzie and Blenkinsop (2006) found that outdoor education promotes an ethic of care among participants within a program. This ethic of care often extends beyond the spatial and temporal boundaries of a program and carries through to participants' everyday lives (McKenzie & Blenkinsop, 2006). Mitten (1994) supported McKenzie and Blenkinsop in their findings, concluding that when students have positive group experiences on wilderness experience programs, they often return home and recreate the type of relationships they have built during their program.

Further to these findings about the transfer of experience and the importance of the group experience, it has been identified that wilderness experience promotes small groups working together to form mini-communities (Itin, 1999). In fact, Gager et al. (1990) listed development of community as one of the main categories of wilderness experience program outcomes. The development of community in wilderness experience programs has been recently and thoroughly documented (Breunig et al., 2008; Sharpe, 2005). The unique setting that can be provided by a wilderness program requires students to work together as a community in order to complete the journey (Sharpe, 2005). Sharpe (2005) found that wilderness experiences help to develop "communitas", or the spirit of community. The outdoor setting, combined with the more general goals of outdoor education, generally demanded a necessity of working as a cohesive unit which led to feeling a sense of community and comradeship with fellow trip mates (Breunig et al., 2008; Sharpe, 2005). There is a focus on the group cooperation, and the individual's responsibility and role within that group, both of which are important to the processes of

experiential education and social justice teaching and learning (Warren, 2005). This focus on community creates an atmosphere capable of deepening an appreciation of several of the aforementioned meanings of social justice, including recognition and respect for the abilities of others and a transition from a “me” and “you” to an “us” frame of mind (Goodman, 2000; Sharpe, 2005).

Further to this, wilderness programs, specifically those with backcountry expeditions can promote a new kind of behavioural development in groups over the course of an expedition (Paisley, Furman, Sibthorp, & Gookin 2008). This is known as expedition behaviour. First written about in 1974 by Paul Petzoldt, the founder of NOLS, expedition behaviour is one way that a group interacts with its members and with outside groups during an expedition (Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, 2006). In effective and positive expedition behaviour, individuals will “serve the mission and goals of the group, be as concerned for others as [they] are for [themselves] and treat everyone with dignity and respect” (Gookin, 2006). The development of expedition behaviour in student groups on extended wilderness expeditions has been empirically explored by Paisley, Furman, Sibthorp and Gookin (2008), who found that individuals began to put the needs of the group over their own, and increased their focus on group-goals instead of focusing only on personal goals. In the framework of this present study, these behaviours can be viewed as individuals developing the type of relationships that are foundational to developing social justice, as they have previously been outlined.

However, despite the body of literature that examines outdoor education and wilderness programs as means to achieve a sense of community, promote group cooperation, and put the needs of the group over individual needs, few researchers have

explicitly linked relationship development, as one of the foundations of social justice and wilderness programs. Even with several important contributions to this largely unexplored, interdisciplinary field, there remains a gap in the literature surrounding the use of wilderness programs to promote the development of the foundations of social justice. The next chapter will explain the research methodology and methods I used to explore this topic to address this gap.

As mentioned previously, my aim was to examine if the foundations of social justice knowledge and beliefs are developed as a result of participation in a wilderness program and what knowledge and beliefs are developed. Further to that, the purpose of this study was to explore if participants' reports about how their knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation on a wilderness program. Four research questions guided this study's purpose:

- 1) What do participants report about the way they view themselves in relation to others before and after their participation on a wilderness program? Have their pre- and post-program views shifted? In what ways?
- 2) What are the specific factors that participants identify as significant to their report about how they feel in relation to others pre- and post- program?
- 3) What are participants' views about the purpose of the wilderness program pre- and post- program? Do they report anything about the intersection between knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and wilderness program participation pre- and post- program? What specifically? Have their views shifted?
- 4) What are the specific factors that participants identify as significant to their report



about the intersection between knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and wilderness program participation pre- and post- program?

### **Chapter 3: Methods**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter will provide a detailed account of the study methods that were employed to explore this study's purpose. First, I will situate myself as the primary researcher. I will then outline the methodological framework that guided the study. Finally, I will discuss the methods that were employed to conduct the research, including my role as researcher, site selection and gaining entry, selection and recruitment of participants, data collection methods and procedures, data analysis, study limitations and ethical considerations.

#### **Situating Myself**

At 16 years old, I was everything that one might expect a stereotypical 16 year-old girl to be. My life was focused on getting my driver's license, shopping, and attending the maximum number of social events possible. Relationships with friends and family, in my mind at that time, existed solely as a means to service me. I can remember constantly thinking about how to ensure that I got more allowance than my brother, about having nicer clothes than my friends, and about finding a way to convince my parents to allot me maximum freedom with minimal responsibilities. When anything new crossed my path, I was intensely interested with how it could benefit me, and concerned with how it might negatively impact me. I rarely, if ever, thought about how my attitude and actions might affect those around me.

The summer after I turned 16, my parents registered me in a wilderness program. The focus of the program was leadership in a wilderness setting. Over the course of the experience I began to feel differently about my relationships with others in my program.

I can remember feeling concerned for a particular girl who was nervous about carrying a canoe and offering to help her, even though this would mean I would have to carry the canoe the majority of the way. When I returned home, I felt different, but I was never able to explicitly state what this change was. Talking to my parents several years later, they affirmed what I was unable to articulate upon returning home. Based on their account, I was treating people with more respect upon my return and I was paying attention to how my actions were affecting others. I was showing increased concern for others' wellbeing in general, more so than I had before my participation in the wilderness program. While the self-centered "me" focused, 16 year-old still existed, I think I had experienced and was expressing something congruent to social justice knowledge and beliefs as result of participating in the program. I was expressing this new learning through thinking about myself in relation to others, perhaps for the first time.

Six years later, at the age of 22, I became a wilderness program guide for a company that offered a variety of wilderness programs to youth. After leading several programs in my first summer, I started to notice that the way participants were treating each other was a phenomenon that seemed to change over the course of the programs. At the outset, participants appeared to typically take action for their own direct benefit. Often, there were arguments over who carried the lightest pack, who would do the dishes on a particular evening and who had to partner up with the slowest paddler on a given day. There seemed to be a common perception among participants that a distinct "me" and "you" existed alongside an apparent sense of urgency, on the part of the participants, that the "me" needs superseded the "you" needs. However, over the course of any given program, I would again and again observe these "me"/"you" distinctions begin to fall

away. It often started with a participant offering to carry the heavy pack, because he/she did not want another group member to get overly tired. A stronger paddler might then offer to partner up with a slower paddler, so that the group could travel together more easily. At a certain point during a program, it would appear as though the participants were no longer acting in a distinctive “me”/ “you” manner, but rather, were beginning to experience the group as a collective entity, as an “us”. Experiences such as these harkened back to my own experiences six years before. I had been thinking that perhaps these participants were experiencing something similar to what I had experienced – a development of one of the foundations of social justice knowledge and beliefs, expressed through a shift in relations to others. My own tacit experience with this phenomenon and those tacit experiences of program participants intrigued me, and have, in part, served as inspiration for this present research study. In addition to providing me with the inspiration for this present study, I used my own experiences as a participant of a wilderness program to contribute to the data collected, and incorporated this data into the results of this present study. More will be said about this later in this chapter.

**Researcher paradigm.** As the primary researcher on a quest to understand others’ experiences, I became aware that while I had experienced something in a particular way, other people did not perceive and report about their own experiences with a similar phenomenon in the same manner. Also, individuals, in a group experience, can have interpretations about certain events that are different than those of other individuals engaged in the same experience. By querying people about their experiences and exploring their reports about their experience, I now have multiple perspectives about people’s participation on wilderness programs and what they learned and experienced.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), this type of approach to research is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which is broadly defined as a research framework that does not separate that which is being studied from its greater context. An interpretivist paradigm also aims to increase insight about a particular phenomenon by improving comprehension of the whole of “something” through an analysis of individual experiences with it. Furthermore, interpretivists believe that:

Knowledge consists of those constructions about which there is a relative consensus (or at least some movement towards consensus) among those competent to interpret the substance of the construction. Multiple ‘knowledges’ can coexist when equally competent (or trusted) interpreters disagree. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 113)

This “multiple knowledges” view of interpretivist research has seen an increase in use and acceptance in social science research over the past 50 years and is often framed within the context of constructivism (Willis, 2007). Constructivism is an epistemology that asserts that all “reality is socially constructed and can only be understood in context” (Willis, 2007, p. 54). Crotty (1998) further characterizes constructivism as a theory about what is “true” and “real”, when there are an unlimited number of ways in which an experience can be interpreted. The many unique interpretations of individuals’ experiences all represent a “true” interpretation and there is no one reality “out there” waiting to be discovered (Crotty, 1998). By using interpretivist and constructivist theories, I was able to hear and better understand each individual’s experiences and his/her contextualized interpretations of the truth.

## **Methodology**

**Qualitative research.** In consideration of the theoretical backdrop of interpretivist and constructivist theories, as well as both the purpose and guiding

questions of this present study, a qualitative framework was chosen to help with the initial, base structure for this present study. However, qualitative research is more than structures and processes used to conduct research, it is a way of viewing the world and provides a series of foundational assumptions that guide the entire process of research (Willis, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) provided the following comprehensive definition of qualitative research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including fieldnotes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them. (p. 3)

This conception of qualitative research outlines a methodology wherein participants' interpretations and personal meanings of experience serve as a valuable source of information and whereby contextualized research is valued. Given this definition, and the purpose of this present study, a qualitative research framework served as a means of inquiry and "meaning making" about people's tacit experience with a wilderness program and how their knowledge and beliefs about issues of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation in a wilderness program (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Although the qualitative framework generally did serve to provide some initial structure to this present study, a more specific methodology within qualitative research was adopted given this study's purpose and that methodology will be described next in some detail.

**Heuristic inquiry.** The aim of heuristic inquiry, as a form of qualitative research, is to answer the foundational question “what is my experience of this phenomenon and the essential experience of others who also experience this phenomenon intensely?” (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

As a novice researcher, sifting through various methodologies to find a methodological approach that would best “fit” with the purpose of this study and the research queries that I had set out to explore, phenomenology initially “felt” like an immediate, natural fit given my intent to explore an individual’s experience. This appeared to be the case because phenomenology is an approach to research that focuses on exploring and understanding a person’s lived experience (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). However, there were still several features of phenomenology that I found unsettling. The rigidity of this approach, with its focus on the structure of experience and relating experiences to time, space and materiality, did not fit with the purpose of this present study (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). Moreover, phenomenology suggests that the researcher should not have personally experienced that which is being investigated (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). This separation of researcher and experience was a clear indicator that phenomenology would not be a good fit for my study given that my own experiences, in part, did indeed inform this present study. Upon further investigation into other qualitative research methodologies that would facilitate the kind of exploration that I was proposing, heuristics emerged as a viable option. As I read about this particular methodological approach, I discovered that heuristics was described as a “passionate yet disciplined” approach to interpreting a tacit experience (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p. 40). Immediately, this captured my interest.

A more thorough reading revealed that “in the heuristic orientation, the researcher’s subjective internal frame of reference, his or her own inner passions, promptings, awareness and experience are all vital components to the process of heuristic inquiry and discovery” (Frick, 1990, p. 66). While many forms of qualitative research promote researcher subjectivity, the strong emphasis to incorporate my own experience into the process of discovery was very relevant to the purpose of this present study, given that I had previously experienced first-hand that which I investigated. Heuristics also provided an avenue to put my experiences into the research and use myself as a participant. The following will outline a working definition of heuristics and locate this current study within this methodology.

The word heuristic comes from the Greek word “*heuretikos*” meaning “I find” (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). This reflects two fundamental elements of heuristics that involve (a) the researcher as an integral part of the research and (b) the exploration and discovery of meaning in experience. Sela-Smith (2002) provided a comprehensive definition of heuristics, as:

The organized and systematic form for investigating human experience in which attention is focused inward on feeling responses of the researcher to the outward situation rather than exclusively to relations between the pieces of that outside situation....heuristics invites the conscious, investigating self to surrender to the feelings in an experience, which carries the researcher to unknown aspects of self and the internal organizational systems not normally known in waking-state consciousness. With new, revised or expanded understanding, internal reorganization naturally occurs, resulting in a self-transformation that almost always has social and transpersonal implications. (p. 59)

Simply stated, heuristics is a process through which a researcher identifies tacit feelings and instincts within an experience and transfers this to an investigation of a similar experience in others, in which their own experience is a valuable source of information



(Moustakas, 1990). The concepts of tacit feelings and knowledge are an integral part of heuristic inquiry as is the importance of personal connection with and insight into the experiences being investigated as the source of inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). Polanyi (1967) described tacit knowledge as an awareness of something, yet an inability to identify the source or meaning of this awareness. Sela-Smith further elaborated on tacit knowledge asserting that:

The tacit dimension of personal knowledge is that internal place where experience, feeling, and meaning join together to form both a picture of the world and a way to navigate that world. Tacit knowledge is a continually growing, multileveled, deep-structural organization that exists for the most part outside of ordinary awareness and is the foundation on which all other knowledge stands. This deep dimension of knowledge is under construction each time a new experience is introduced. The individual constantly compares the outer world with the inner knowledge base to evaluate and to determine what it is that is being experienced. (p. 60)

The tacit knowledge of participants that was uncovered and explored in this present study focused on people's experiences and feelings about themselves in relation to others as a result of their participation in a wilderness program. I, the primary researcher experienced an integral shift in the way I thought about and related to others over the course of a wilderness program; however, the details and meaning of this experience were not easily articulated or fully understood. Heuristic inquiry and this present study have explicated the ideas, thoughts and feelings associated with participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1990).

Moreover, heuristic inquiry aims to keep individual participant experiences visible during the process of data condensation and analysis (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985). Valuing individual experience is important as it is congruent with the interpretivist and constructivist theories of multiple truths and realities and those theories

provide a theoretical framework that guided this present study, as previously mentioned. More importantly, the valuing of individual experience coincides with the purpose of this present study.

While there is no one prescription for “doing” heuristic research, Moustakas (1990) proposed that in general, heuristic inquiry is guided by six main steps. First, the research process begins with an *initial engagement* where the researcher locates herself in the study, and begins a process of disciplined self-reflection. The researcher must “discover an intense interest, a passionate concern that calls out to the researcher, one that holds important social meanings and personal, compelling implications” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27). The second phase of heuristic inquiry involves a complete *immersion* of the researcher into the area of study. Moustakas depicted the immersion process as enabling “the researcher to come to be on intimate terms with the question – to live it and grow in knowledge and understanding of it...people, places, meetings, readings, nature – all offer possibilities for understanding the phenomenon” (p. 28). For the present study, this phase included an exploration and review of relevant literature, the development of a proposal for research, and the process of data collection. The third phase is a period of *incubation*. Incubation is a process when:

The researcher is no longer absorbed in the topic in any direct way or alert to things, situations, events or people that will contribute to an understanding of this phenomenon. Nevertheless growth is taking place. The period of incubation enables the inner tacit dimension to reach its full possibilities. (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28)

Fourth is the process of *illumination*, described by Moustakas as a “breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities into themes inherent in the question...an awakening to new dimensions of knowledge” (p. 29). Illumination is the first phase of data analysis.

The fifth phase, *explication* aims to “understand the various layers of meaning” that were uncovered in primary data analysis (Moustakas, 1990, p. 31). This was a phase of secondary data analysis, where I attached meaning to the themes uncovered during the primary stages of data analysis. Moustakas described the final phase of heuristic research, *creative synthesis*, as a process of developing a narrative depiction of the components and core themes of the data analysis during the illumination and explication phases (Moustakas, 1990). Using the six phases of heuristic inquiry developed by Moustakas as a general guide, this next section will discuss the research methods that were used in this present study in more detail.

### **Research Methods and Processes**

The following section will provide a detailed description of my role as the primary researcher, the selection of the research site and process of gaining entry, participant selection and recruitment procedures, methods of data collection, data analysis and reporting, study limitations as well as ethical considerations.

**My role as researcher.** Heuristics is a deeply personal quest to understand an experienced phenomena – one that focuses on the researcher’s experiences as well as the participants’ (Moustakas, 1990). As such, both the past and present experiences of the researcher associated with the phenomena under study are important to the overall research. This section describes how both past and present experiences were explored to further insert myself into this present study.

A heuristics study begins when the researcher experiences something meaningful, and strives to better understand it (Moustakas, 1990). As the researcher’s knowledge and experiences are an important part of the data, they can choose to employ methods of data

collection to help them recount their own experiences. These methods can be virtually anything, and should be selected to help the researcher tell his/her own story (Moustakas, 1990).

With so much choice, recent heuristic studies have greatly varied in the way the researchers collected data on themselves. Some used journals, some used interviews and some used only memory to create individual depictions of their own experience. Thus, it is clear in both heuristic literature and recent heuristics studies that there is not one way that a researcher *must* or *should* collect data on themselves. In this present study, I decided that the best way for me to personally collect data on myself would be to use both forms of data collection that I used for the other participants, both journals and interviews. However, it was clear that as I had experienced the phenomenon under study many years ago, and I was turning inward for answers that I was asking myself, that the methods of data collection would need to be altered slightly to help me produce the richest and most accurate data possible. The following describes the procedures I used to collect data on myself.

The first step of collecting data on myself was retrieving my old journal from the wilderness program on which I first experienced the phenomenon that this present study is focused on. Although I did not write a journal that was guided by the specific questions used in this present study during my own wilderness leadership program because this study had not been conceptualized at that point, I did complete a group journal with other members of my program when I was 16. This journal was retrieved and used as an additional source. The process of using a researcher's past journals has

been used in recent heuristics studies as a way of recalling and incorporating past present experiences into present research (Taylor, 1996; VanLerberghe, 2009).

In addition to my own journals, I answered interview questions to add to my own understanding of my experience, and help recall further details. I used the same questions and guidelines from the second interview to interview myself. I only used the second interview on myself because I had already experienced the wilderness program, and could not establish a pre- program report as I had with the participants of this present study. I felt that attempting to do so might interfere with participants' actual pre-program reports. I began by recording myself doing the second interview, however, I felt very personally distracted and awkward asking myself questions and then answering them while being recorded. Thus, I did not record this interview, but instead read the interview questions and then created written responses. As I wrote, I attempted to give myself the same prompts as I did the participants during their interview. For example, when I wrote about my role in the group, I prompted my written responses by asking myself if my role in the group changed over the course of the program, and why I thought the changes happened. Completing my personal interview this way felt like a more natural process to me, and one that allowed me to provide more in-depth detail of my experiences. This form of written, self-dialogue has been used in past heuristics studies and is acknowledged by Moustakas (1990) as an effective tool for gathering data on the researcher's experience (Varani, 1985). Furthermore, I used this technique because I felt it would best allow me to fully saturate the descriptions of my own experience and help me tell my story, which is the intent of collecting data from the researcher (Moustakas, 1990).

The process of collecting data on myself was both a challenging and rewarding experience. It was a challenge to let myself be an expert in my own experience, as Moustakas (1990) cautioned it might be, and was also challenging to trust deeply in the truth of my own experiences and inner feelings. I found the process of “digging” into my own memories and feelings, to uncover the true ways that I thought about myself and about others challenging. However, this process was rewarding too, as it was enlightening to articulate my feelings about such an important time in my life. The heuristic process embraced my own experiences, deeming them important as they stand individually, and in relation to those of the other participants.

After collecting data from myself as well as from participants, as will be outlined below, I entered a period of incubation. As previously mentioned, Moustakas (1990) describes the phase of incubation during heuristic research as a period of mental and physical separation from the data. During this time, the researcher is meant to allow inner feelings and tacit knowledge to surface (Moustakas, 1990). When I finished data collection in August 2010, I began this process of incubation. During this time I took part in a whitewater canoe expedition and led a backpacking expedition where I was able to remain connected to and gain further insight into wilderness trips in general; however, I was separated from the specific study data collected from the wilderness leadership program under investigation. This period of incubation lasted until October 2010, at which time I began to transcribe and analyze all of the collected data. This process is outlined later in this chapter.

**Site selection and gaining entry.** Site selection began with identification of a wilderness program that would fit with my study’s purpose. It was also important that

the selected site was a program serving participants with similar experiences to my own, as advised by Moustakas (1990). As the goal of heuristic inquiry is to explore and understand a phenomenon that the researcher has herself experienced, I attempted to find a program that was connected to my tacit knowledge of the shift in behaviours and attitudes that is the focus of this present study (Moustakas, 1990). In heuristic research, there are studies that have recruited participants from a variety of settings or programs (Taylor, 1996; VanLerberghe, 2009), and studies that recruit from only one setting or program (Bunker, 1998; Frank, 2008). Thus, the question arises: Why choose to examine the lived experiences of a phenomenon in one setting instead of several? For this answer, I again turn to Moustakas (1990) who advises that the heuristic researcher must immerse herself completely in her quest to understand a lived experience. Thus, I chose to recruit participants from one program in order to allow myself to become knowledgeable with the experiences and surroundings of a small number of participants attached to one program. Had I selected participants from a variety of programs, I would not have been able to fully immerse myself in any one program as fully.

Thus, I set out to identify a program that provided participants with experiences similar to those that I experienced. The program I had originally participated in was no longer in operation. However, I was familiar with another wilderness program provider that offered a very similar program. This wilderness program provider (hereafter referred to as *the company*) has been in operation for 16 years, and offers seven different youth wilderness programs, targeting different age groups ranging from people aged eight to 20 years of age. When the research took place, I had been employed with the company for two seasons as a wilderness guide, and had witnessed changes in the behaviours and

attitudes of campers on a variety of their programs. Although the company runs seven different youth wilderness programs, only one mirrored the duration, intensity and age range of that on which I had experienced my own shift in the way I viewed others, when I was 16. The wilderness program that I selected that would provide me with participants with similar experiences was The Wilderness Leadership Program (WLP), a 47-day wilderness program that emphasizes leadership skills. Each year the program runs with a minimum of six and a maximum of 10 participants. Participants are between the ages of 16 and 20 and are generally an even mix of both males and females, although the exact ratio changes from year to year. The program consists of three components: training; wilderness expedition; and debrief. The program begins in late June when the participants arrive at the research site for one week to practice the technical skills they will need for their extended wilderness expedition. This skills training happens under the guidance of the director of the WLP and two other staff members who also lead the expedition. Participants are generally taught the following skills: map reading; food preparation; whitewater rescue; whitewater canoeing; and wilderness first aid. There is also a focus on leadership theories and practices. Following this week of skill development and training at the research site, the WLP participants, the program director and the two other staff members set off on a 33-day wilderness expedition down a river in Northern Quebec, during which time there is no contact (except in the event of emergencies) with any individuals at the company's base of operations. When the wilderness expedition portion of the program has ended, participants return to the company's base of operations to debrief the trip and typically enjoy two leisure days, where they can relax post-program and prepare to say goodbye to the other participants



and staff. The age range, schedule, curriculum, and activities of the WLP all mirror those of the program I participated in. Both programs accepted individuals between the ages of 16 and 20, both consisted of training time at a summer camp setting followed by a wilderness expedition, and both had a curriculum focused on leadership and personal development. For these reasons, I found that the WLP was congruent with the program I had experienced and was capable of providing participants with experiences similar to mine.

Just as the selected program must provide participants with the opportunity to contribute meaningful, accurate data about a lived experience, so too must the research site. The research site is important to a qualitative heuristic study, as this methodology favours research that is conducted in a participant's "natural" setting (Moustakas, 1990; Willis, 2007). As this present study was interested in exploring if participants' reports about how their knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation on a wilderness program, it was logical and congruent with heuristics that data collection took place at the site of the selected wilderness program.

The WLP operates out of the company's base of operations, and it was this location that was used as the research site. The research site is located in the Muskoka region of Ontario, near the border of Algonquin Park, Ontario. This site includes over 200 acres of privately owned forested property on which there was a lodge, a small lake, and separate cabins for staff and program participants. Participants of the WLP spent 12 days at the research site, nine days pre- wilderness expedition and three days post- wilderness expedition.

Gaining entry into the research site required two important steps. First, I secured approval from the gatekeepers to enter the research site as a researcher (Patton, 2002). In this case, the gatekeepers were the two owners of the company. I, the primary researcher had an existing relationship with the owners because I was employed with the company. I met with the owners in December 2009 and explained my proposed intent to conduct research and both agreed to allow me entry to conduct my study. A formal letter from the owners was emailed to me in March 2010, allowing me to access to the site.

The second step of gaining entry involved me being physically present at the research site (Patton, 2002). As I was an employee of the company at the time my research was conducted, I was physically working at the research site from May – August 2010. When the staff arrived in early June I met with the three wilderness program staff to secure their permission to conduct research with the participants of the particular wilderness program they were guiding and answered any further questions they had. The staff reported that they felt that the interviews and journals that the participants would complete would be beneficial to participants and not detract from their experience in the WLP. This was important, as it was the wilderness leadership program staff that scheduled the time for participants of this present study to meet with me.

**Participant selection and recruitment.** Once the WLP was identified as a viable program, I needed to invite young people from that program to serve as study participants. Participants were purposefully selected for their ability to contribute to the richness of the data, and for their ability to contribute to the insights and understanding of that which is being investigated (Merriam, 1998; Moustakas, 1990). Simply put, participants were selected for their ability to contribute to an increased understanding

about the phenomena under investigation (Merriam, 1988). This process is described in more detail below.

Specific to heuristic inquiry, Moustakas (1990) suggests that the number of people that participate in a study should be sufficient enough to provide a deepened understanding of an experience or phenomena. That said, however, Moustakas asserts that there are occasions when one person can provide sufficient information to deepen an understanding on a certain experience. Heuristic inquiry values depth over breadth (Moustakas, 1990), yet I was interested in understanding the experiences of multiple people, I decided to aim for the participation of four to six people, in addition to myself. Given the purpose of this present study, and heuristic “best practices” (Moustakas, 1990), I decided that four participants would be the smallest number of participants to provide sufficient data to credibly analyze and yield trustworthy results (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1990). My decision in this aspect of the methods was supported by several recent heuristics studies in which the number of participants ranges from four to nine (Dilts-Harryman, 2007; Leisure, 2007; Talyor, 1996; VanLergerge, 2009). Thus, selecting four to six participants, including myself would be congruent with methodologically similar studies, and heuristics best practices. In order to recruit participants, I solicited the voluntary involvement of the participants from the WLP by extending an invitation to participants via email with a letter of invitation attached (see Appendix A).

In early June 2010, four weeks before the beginning of the program, I was given a list of all of the program participants. In 2010, the company had six individuals registered in the WLP. I invited all six participants to participate in this present study.

Five of the six participants agreed to participate in the study. The one individual that chose not to participate in this present study did not give a reason for this. He simply stated that he was not interested in participating. As I did not want to make him feel pressured to participate, or uncomfortable in his choice not to, I did not question him further about his decision. Worth mentioning however, is that this individual was the only Francophone in a group of English speakers.

I did not use purposeful sampling in a manner that targeted any specific demographic groups during participant selection, as my study was not focused on the differences between the experiences of individuals from different demographic groups. In total, four males and one female participated in this present study, all were White, English-speaking, North Americans and were between the ages of 16 and 20.

All six of the initially selected individuals were first contacted by email, with a letter of invitation to participate in this present study (see Appendix A). Contacting participants by email provided them with ample time to discuss and contemplate their own participation in this study, as required by the Brock University Research Ethics Board. One individual from the six chose not to participate in this study. This individual was still provided with a journal that he was able to use when and how he pleased, so that he could participate in the journaling activities during the program. This was done in an attempt not to separate him from the group. I did not read this individual's journal and it was not used as data. All five individuals that chose to participate were then mailed a hard copy of the letter of invitation, outlining the study and an informed consent form through the regular post (see Appendix B). All five participants mailed their informed consent to the research site before their arrival (postage was provided to them).

In the evening of the first day that the wilderness participants were at the study site, I held a brief 15-minute introductory session during which I introduced myself, the study, and answered questions they had. Participants asked if they would get to keep their journals after the research was finished, and I assured them that I would send them back. They also asked if their leaders would see their journals or listen to their interviews, and I assured them that both would be kept confidential. I thanked them for participating in the study, and informed them that their first interview would be the following day. At this point, their leaders came in and they continued with their program activities.

**Data collection.** As previously mentioned, while there is no one prescription for “doing” heuristic research, Moustakas (1990) does recommend several potential methods for data collection, including, interviews, journals, personal artifacts, artwork and poetry. For the purpose of this present study, and given the research questions and the participant sample, interviews and journals were employed as the primary sources of data collection. These will be discussed in the following section.

**Interviews.** Interviews were the main method of data collection. The following section will describe the interview procedures and process. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) have suggested that interviews are one of the most effective methods of data collection in qualitative research because they hold the possibility of gathering large amounts of information from an individual, while still maintaining the “human” aspect of qualitative research. Furthermore, Moustakas (1990) and Sela-Smith (2002) both agreed that interviews are the most common and most valuable way to collect information on participant experiences in a heuristic inquiry. Interviews are valuable to heuristics

because they allow for the participant to tell the story of their own lived experience, yet the interviews can still be gently guided in one direction or another, depending upon the study purpose, by the interviewer (Moustakas, 1990).

Given the purpose of this present study, which was to examine if the foundations of social justice knowledge and beliefs are developed as a result of participation in a wilderness program and what knowledge and beliefs are developed, each of the participants was interviewed twice; once before the wilderness program, and once after, as a means to gather participants' pre- and post- program views. The interviews for this study were semi-structured as suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), who found that semi-structured interviews are most effective when examining the subjective, lived experiences of participants. This type of interview involves the use of a pre-established outline of topics and proposed questions that direct the interview (see Appendices C and D). However, at the discretion of either the participant (in responding) or in the interviewer (in asking), the responses and questions may diverge from the proposed structure and follow new directions should they emerge during the interview and, that possibility for divergence, in fact, is what brings "richness" to the discussion (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In this present study, the semi-structured interview, with this allowance for some divergence, provided participants with an opportunity to help shape the interview and further provided them with an opportunity to elaborate on what they found important and relevant to their own experiences. All this kept with the heuristic tradition of recognizing participants as experts of their own experience (Moustakas, 1990). To keep the interviews flowing I employed a variety of techniques including, good eye contact, acknowledging, asking for clarification, repeating information, and

validating what was being said. These specific techniques have also been used in other heuristics studies to promote dialogue that flowed as naturally as possible (Polych, 2010).

Both interviews took place in the basement lounge of the lodge at the study site. The lounge provided a private location that was easily accessible by both researcher and participant. Two comfortable chairs were set up facing each other with a small coffee table in between. Participants were called down one at a time to complete their interviews. During the interviews, I attempted to help participants feel as relaxed and comfortable as possible, as is suggested by Moustakas (1990). To do this, I engaged in casual conversation with participants before starting the interview questions. To further help establish this sense of comfort, I maintained an awareness of the interviewee's body language and tone of voice to monitor if the interviewee was projecting a sense of discomfort as is suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). During my first interview, I noticed that the participant felt uneasy about where to look and where to place his hands. To help that individual feel more comfortable, I gave him, and all of the participants after, the option of having a ball to roll around in his/her hands. All participants accepted this, and held onto or rolled the ball around in their hands during their interview. This appeared to help relax all of the participants and contributed to the comfortable atmosphere. More will be said about the first and second interviews specifically in the following section. Both interviews were audio recorded.

The first interview took place on the second day that participants were at the research site. Moustakas (1990) and Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) have all suggested that there is no standard length for interviews in qualitative research and heuristic inquiry, although they typically last between 30 and 120 minutes (Patton, 2002). Moustakas

further suggested that heuristic interviews should be conversational in nature and not “ruled by the clock” (1990, p. 46), stressing that in the interview, time is not of the essence, but allowing the participant to tell his story in an open, comfortable way is. Taking all of this information into account, I loosely scheduled time allotments for interviews, but was aware that it would be keeping with heuristics best practice if I allowed interviews to progress naturally, and this resulted in them being either shorter or longer than the scheduled time allotment. I scheduled the first interview to last approximately 30 minutes. Because the participants were between 16 and 20, I felt that their experiences would be saturated in less time than an adult, and for this reason I chose to schedule interviews to be shorter relative to the majority of qualitative interviews. This decision is congruent with other recent heuristic studies that also used 30-minute interviews (Blinston, 2005; Calderone, 2007; Fehl, 2011). Participant interviews were all different lengths; times of the interviews were, 19 minutes, 22 minutes, 23 minutes, 29 minutes and 34 minutes. These interview times did have some variance in length, and high levels of variance in interview time can impact the reliability and trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2007). However, despite their variance, each participant answered the same questions in the same order, and I feel that each participant was given enough time to share their experiences to the point of saturation, as Moustakas suggests. At the end of each interview, each participant was asked if there was anything else about their previous experiences or their upcoming experiences that they wanted to discuss. One participant took this opportunity to discuss how he was feeling particularly nervous about his upcoming solo experience. None of the other participants had anything further to discuss. This prompting of participants to share any information that they felt was relevant to the



discussion, but had not yet been brought up, helped to confirm that discussions of participant experience had been saturated. As participants were viewed as experts of their own experience in this present study, their reports that they had no further pertinent information were accepted. The purpose of the first interview was to establish a pre-program report about how participants viewed themselves in relation to other program participants, and to discuss their previous experiences with wilderness programs and how they viewed themselves in relation to others over the course of those programs. In actuality, the first interview focused heavily on the participants' fears about fitting in, group development, conflicts and the physical challenge of the upcoming expedition. For example, the only female participant spoke at length about her reservations about being the only female and her anxiety associated with that. Another participant focused on how his poor physical condition often caused him to be left out in social situations and felt that he would be unable to complete the more physically demanding tasks. While I did refocus the first interviews often, I also allowed participants to finish a particular thought or story even when we were off track. I did this to help participants feel comfortable and to help affirm that what they had to say was important. I also did this in an effort to gather additional information that would help to highlight the personality and "voice" of each participant when portraying them in the results, as is important to heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990).

The second interview took place on the day before the WLP ended. Interviews were scheduled during participants' free time, when most were packing their things to leave the following day. The second interview took place in the same location as the first interview, in the lounge. Chairs were set up in the same way and the same ball was also

provided. The same setting was recreated for the second interview to make the surroundings seem familiar and help make participants more comfortable. The purpose of this second interview was to establish a post-program report about how participants viewed themselves in relation to other program participants and a post-program report about how they viewed themselves in relation to the others in the group, and to discuss their specific experiences related to this that occurred during the wilderness program. These interviews were focused on the elicitation of reports about specific experiences that they felt were connected to the shifts they felt about themselves in relations to others.

The second interview was also structured in a manner similar to the first one, in a semi-structured fashion that promoted genuine dialogue, and was somewhat unrestricted in terms of exact length (Moustakas, 1990). The interview was scheduled to be 45 minutes. The second interview was scheduled to be longer (in comparison to the first interview), to provide participants with more time to expound upon stories from their program – those that they felt were most relevant to the study purpose (see Appendix D). I felt that a longer interview was needed to saturate participants' reports about their experiences because they would have many events and stories to share from the program post – expedition. As mentioned above, there is no outline in heuristic research for the number of interviews that should be used or length (Moustakas, 1990). However, several recent heuristics studies that have included two sets of interviews, have also had their second interview longer than the first, citing more in depth discussions of the phenomenon, specific details, and the natural ebb and flow of conversation as rationale for this (Butler, 2007; Pardy, 2011). Participants' second interviews lasted 29 minutes, 32 minutes, 32 minutes, 35 minutes and 39 minutes. None of the interviews were as long

as I had initially scheduled, however, they were all longer than participants first interviews.

***Journals.*** As previously mentioned, the relevant research on heuristic inquiry suggests that journals can be used as a secondary data source because they serve to provide a distinct and unique venue for participants to report about their experiences (Moustakas, 1990; van Manen, 1997). The following section will provide an explanation of specific journal guidelines, an overview of journal focus and questions, the reality of the journaling process, and finally a discussion of the use of journals.

This present study used journals as a second source of data collection. Participants' written journal responses were used to shed further light on their tacit experiences – ones that were difficult to articulate by interview words alone. For example, the journal guidelines provided opportunities for participants to draw pictures, write poetry and use figurative language to communicate feelings and experiences (see Appendix E). This method of data collection is often used in outdoor recreation and outdoor education in general as a means for participants to reflect on their experiences and as means for participants to capture information that might later be forgotten (Dyment & O'Connell, 2008). Journals were used in this study for both of these reasons.

Journals were provided to participants during their first interview. Participants were encouraged to journal at will throughout any point in the program but the recommendation of a minimum entry of 10 minutes / night was strongly encouraged. When participants received their journals in the first interview, they were informed that there would be no penalty for not completing a journal each night, and that if at any time the journaling activity was in conflict with their experience or for any reason

compromised their wellbeing, they should desist journaling until a time when it became appropriate. There were several factors on this trip that did interfere with participant journaling; these will be discussed in the limitations section.

Journals were guided by a series of questions that attempted to focus participant reflection on their perceptions of themselves in relation to the others in the group and their feelings about the group in general. Guidelines also prompted participants to write about any important or meaningful experiences that they experienced during the expedition, both positive and negative. There were seven different journal questions altogether, with the general guideline that when all seven questions had been completed, participants would begin from the beginning again – a seven-question cycle. Thus, participants were asked to answer each question at four different times over the course of the expedition. Each question prompted participants to describe their feelings and experiences about the group and their role in it through various written and illustrated techniques. For example, the first journal question asked participants to write 10 words that they associated with the group at that time. Another question asked them to draw a picture about what they felt their role in the group was. Each journal question also asked participants to try to explain (when possible) where they can why they used certain words or pictures and to describe any significant experiences from that day. The complete journal guidelines and questions can be found in Appendix E. As heuristic inquiry is focused on uncovering tacit feelings and experiences, allowing many different forms of expression are encouraged to help participants express thoughts and ideas where a standard written paragraph form reflection may fail (Moustakas, 1990). Although the seven question cycle was created to act as a guide to help participants that may be new to

journaling express their feelings and knowledge, participants were also informed that their journal was meant to guide them in reflection, and if they found one type of question hard to complete or they did not find it meaningful to them, then they could choose another question for that day that would better reflect their experiences. Journals were collected after participants returned to the research site post- expedition.

In general, most participants followed the seven-question cycle skipping one or two questions, and replacing them with paragraph-form responses. One participant found the question about metaphors particularly challenging, while another did not like to write poetry. Most participants were diligent in completing their journals each night, with the exception of a few nights missing for each participant. Participants informed me in their journals or in their interviews that during the expedition there were several days where the group arrived at camp very late, and participants were too tired to write in their journals. There were also times when participants were frustrated or upset and did not feel like writing in their journals. One participant in particular completed very few of his journal entries due to his feelings of frustration and anger toward the program for a large part of the trip. In a note to me in the back of his journal, he reported that he found most of the reflective journaling to be frustrating. His feelings were explored in the second interview and he provided both poetry and metaphors in his second interview. As this was his personal path to uncovering his tacit knowledge and effectively communicating his experiences, it did not negatively impact the results of this present study.

The completed journals were used in two ways in this present study. Journals were primarily used as a data source that underwent analysis. More will be said about that in the next section. Journal responses also served as a means to gain some

understanding of the student experience prior to the post- program interview. I used journals to gain a better understanding of participant experiences by reading the journals and making notes on the important information that I later asked participants to elaborate on in the interview. For example, during the interview of the participant who completed very few journal entries, I asked why he had not completed the entries and asked him to reflect on the specific events or experiences that were responsible for him deciding not to journal. For some other participants I made a note of interesting drawings they made and asked them to try to elaborate further on what they thought they represented. The journals were returned to participants at the researcher's expense when the thesis project was completed. All participant data, including interviews and journals were analyzed using the strategies described in the following section.

**Data analysis.** In qualitative research in general, data analysis involves analyzing data in a manner that distills and reduces data through a process of identifying significant patterns (Patton, 2002). This process creates a framework for conveying the essence of what the data exposes (Patton, 2002). More specifically, in heuristic inquiry, data analysis involves illuminating themes and patterns – those reported by participants (Moustakas, 1990). The data analysis process that was employed for this present study will be examined in this section.

Data analysis began with a process of transcribing both the participant journals and interviews. Both data sources were transcribed verbatim, so that they existed in a visual, electronic form. This was completed by first transferring the digital audio files from each interview to my personal computer. I then listened to each interview's audio file with headphones and typed a transcript for the oral interview word for word. Hand-

written journals were read, and typed out word for word, so that the data were organized and existed in a format similar to the interview transcripts. Some journals contained artwork that was scanned, and placed in the transcribed document for that participant. Both my own interview and my journal existed in hand-written form, and they were also transcribed so that they existed in an electronic form as well. Once transcribed, interviews and journals were stored on my personal, password-protected computer. The transcription process itself provided me with the opportunity to initially engage and become familiar with the entire data set, as a whole, as has been suggested by Moustakas (1990). When transcription was finished, the first round of member checks were completed, as suggested by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). A second round of member checks was also completed after initial data analysis. More will be said about this later. To complete the first round of member checks, transcribed interviews and journals were sent electronically to the participants to provide them with the opportunity to revise or amend any errant “bits” of information (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). No participants requested any changes to the data. The complete, raw data were then printed and grouped together by participant, as a means to examine each participant’s complete experience (Moustakas, 1990). I collated the documents, ordering them chronologically as a means to analyze each participant’s experiences as they happened for him/her, and keep the experiences as intact as possible, as is the goal in heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990).

Heuristic inquiry does not prescribe any one single process for analyzing data, however, Moustakas (1990) has suggested that a general inductive approach should be used with the goals of creating individual depictions of each participant’s experiences and a composite depiction consisting of core patterns and themes from all participants. Both

individual depictions and the composite depiction were created from the data collected from each participant and these processes will be described next.

First, as has been advised by Moustakas (1990), I created individual depictions. Moustakas described the individual depiction as a story of a person's experience from both interviews and journals I created individual depictions for each participant, including myself. To achieve this, I highlighted all of the data from each participant describing his/her experiences and feelings before, during and after the trip. From these highlighted sections, a narrative of each participant's experience emerged that included thoughts, feelings and experiences before, during and after their wilderness program. I added biographical information for each participant to provide further context for his or her experiences.

Once individual depictions were created, a copy of each participant's individual depiction was sent to them electronically to complete the second round of member checks. Completing member checks at this point is congruent with heuristics "best practice" (Moustakas, 1990). This allowed participants to assess whether the individual depictions accurately captured the essence of their experiences. I received no feedback or revisions from participants. More will be said about the member checking process in the limitations section of this chapter. Once this process was complete, I began creating the composite depiction.

Moustakas (1990) described the composite depiction as a group portrayal of the experience, encompassing all of the common themes experienced by each participant and the group as a whole. Moustakas suggested that these themes should emerge through an inductive process of engaging with the individual depictions and raw data. Creswell



(2007) defined inductive data analysis as method of building “patterns, categories and themes from the ‘bottom-up’, by organizing the data into increasingly abstract units of information” (p. 38). Although inductive analysis can be conducted in a variety of ways, the use of coding as a method to guide analysis is suggested by several qualitative researchers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Willis, 2007). Coding, in general, has been defined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as “breaking down text into manageable segments and attaching one or more keywords to a text segment in order to permit later retrieval of the segment” (p. 323). The codes can then be grouped thematically to create larger categories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As heuristics literature does not prescribe a specific method for allowing themes to emerge from the data, for the purpose of this study, I used coding and code categorization as a way to guide the inductive analysis process to uncover themes and patterns. The following describes the process of data analysis in more depth.

Using a second copy of the participants’ data sets, I began a process of initial coding. Patton (2002) described coding as an initial analysis of the data whereby meaning is attached to raw data. The goal of coding is identifying, naming, categorizing and describing phenomena that arise in the data (Patton, 2002). I began reading through the transcripts, one participant at a time. As I read, I highlighted each individual relevant thought, and created a code for that thought. For example, one participant said during his first interview “I am worried that I am not a lot like the other people in this group.” For this thought, the code “nervous about fitting in” was created. Some codes were created from short phrases, while others were from multiple sentences. Each created code was recorded in a chart with the corresponding highlighting colour recorded beside each code.

As this was an inductive process, I allowed codes to emerge as I read the transcriptions, creating as many codes as appeared (Creswell, 2007). As new data were read, individual thoughts were either attached to a pre-identified code or a new code was created. When I reached the end of one participant's set of data, I re-read that data two more times in its entirety to ensure that no relevant thoughts were left uncoded. Data from each participant were analyzed using this same process. After all of the raw data had undergone coding, the result was a list of codes that identified all of the individual thoughts from all of the participants. In total, there were 49 identified codes.

Once the process of coding was completed, interrelated and similar codes were merged, and given new titles. For example, the codes “improved paddling abilities,” “improved portaging abilities,” and “improved whitewater rescue abilities” were all merged and called “Developed Technical Skills.” Once this process was completed, there were 24 refined codes. These refined codes were then further grouped into larger categories based on their overall thematic interrelatedness. This process was described simply by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as the second round of data analysis. Patton (2002) further described code categorization as a procedure in which the initial set of codes created by the coding process are further related conceptually to one another through inductive reasoning. The result of this process was a list of six overarching thematic categories, with 3 – 6 refined codes (hereafter referred to as sub-themes) corresponding to each. Once the list of themes and sub-themes was created, I reread the individual depictions, to ensure that the themes and sub-themes captured the essence of each participant’s experience, as has been suggested by Moustakas (1990).

Given the manner in which I completed data analysis, I feel assured that the themes and sub-themes represented participants' reports of their experiences. Completing member checks with the raw data, and again with the individual depictions helped to confirm this.

**Reporting of findings.** In order to summarize and present the results that were obtained through the aforementioned process of data analysis, I was guided by both heuristics literature and recent studies. As heuristics literature suggests there were many ways to present findings, I turned to recent heuristics studies to provide further guidance (Leisure, 2007; Moustakas, 1990; Taylor, 1996; VanLerberge, 2009). In the most basic form, heuristic inquiry focuses on describing and understanding one particular experience or phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). The presentation of this experience or phenomenon typically follows a general outline of presenting the individual depictions and composite depiction in some form. However, while following this general outline, there are many different ways that researchers have presented their findings. For this present study, I followed the format used by VanLerberge (2009) and Taylor (1996) as this format reflected heuristics best practice and was valuable in addressing the guiding questions of this present study. Using this format, I will first present the individual depictions of each participant in their entirety, followed by the composite depiction, arranged by theme.

Presenting the individual depictions required little extra work, as these were already completed. They are presented with my individual depiction first, and the other five thereafter as is common practice (Taylor, 1996). As previously mentioned, individual depictions are a narrative summary of each participant's experiences, created by the researcher. In order to present the findings of the composite depiction, I needed to

write something that was both readable and reflected heuristics best practice. When presenting the composite depiction, heuristics literature has suggested that thematic structures should be outlined and described (Moustakas, 1990). VanLerberge (2009) and Leisure (2007) both presented their composite depictions by outlining each theme and then describing the core qualities in them. It is these examples that I followed in order to present my composite depiction. Heuristics literature also urges researchers not to lose participant voice in this process. In order to maintain participant voice, I inserted several verbatim quotes, metaphors, poems and interview material from each participant in the composite depictions as was done in previous heuristics studies (Leisure, 2007; Taylor, 1996; VanLerberge, 2009).

**Limitations.** As with any study, there were limitations and these must be both explicated and addressed (Patton, 2002). In this section I will first explore the limitations of this present study in terms of reliability and generalizability. Next I will identify the ways that qualitative research and this present study specifically addressed the limitations associated with trustworthiness. Finally, I will examine researcher subjectivity relevant to this present study, discuss how it may limit the study's findings, and identify the steps that were taken to manage my own subjectivity.

While the limitations of reliability and generalizability are most important to the validity of quantitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), they are considerations for qualitative research as well. In both quantitative and qualitative research, importance is placed on whether the data are valid and representative of the area under examination. The methods for examining reliability and generalizability are considerably different between the two research paradigms (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In qualitative research,

limitations are “best” addressed by examining a study’s trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Because of this, the issue of trustworthiness will be discussed in the most depth with a briefer discussion of reliability and generalizability first.

Reliability refers to a study’s ability to be replicated or repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If the study’s methodology is well conceived and “fits” with the study purpose and if the methods themselves are detailed and clear, concise, and complete, then the possibility of study replication is enhanced (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Rigour, in the way in which the study is enacted (i.e. methods), also helps ensure that the study findings will be less dependent on the personal interpretations of participants and the specific events of the WLP (Creswell, 2007). In other words, the study itself will be less “whimsical” if it is well thought out and articulated. It is my hope that I have accomplished that here.

Generalizability refers to the ability of a study’s results to be extended to a broader context – from the sample, study population to a population at large (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The context specific nature of this study, and the small sample population were not conducive to a high degree of generalizability. The company that hosted the WLP was a relatively small company in comparison to larger organizations like Outward Bound. The unique practices, philosophies and goals of the company yielded context-specific results that are not generalizable to all wilderness programs as a whole. Furthermore, the demographic of the participant group did not represent much diversity. All participants were between the ages of 16 and 20, came from upper middle class families and were White, English speaking, North Americans. Thus, the study results may not be generalizable outside of this demographic. Overall, generalizability is

not the goal of heuristic research. Heuristics is instead concerned with “meanings, not measurement; with essence, not appearance; with quality, not quantity; with experience, not behaviour” (Douglas & Moustakas, 1985, p. 42). However, that said, the specific study methods, including the use of the methodology of heuristic inquiry, which appears to be unique within the relevant body of knowledge, may be generalizable to future studies that examine similar phenomena, or even the same phenomena but in a different context to that of a wilderness program, as this study has done.

In qualitative research, one of the key limitations that requires consideration is that of a study’s trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This next section will further explicate this concept and will discuss the measures that were taken to promote trustworthiness of the study findings.

***Trustworthiness of the data.*** Trustworthiness is used in qualitative research to consider if a study’s findings are “worth paying attention to” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness is assessed in four areas: (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c) dependability; and (d) confirmability. In each of these areas, there are several practices that promote data trustworthiness.

The first area, credibility, refers to whether the data collected from the study are credible from the point of view of the participant. In this present study, credibility specifically refers to whether results accurately reflect the essence of participants’ individual experiences. The ability of participants to accurately and effectively record and describe their experiences was acknowledged as a limitation of this study’s credibility. During interviews it became clear that certain participants had a lower than expected level of emotional maturity. By this, I mean that some participants struggled to

express certain feelings and events in an honest and penetrating way. During these interviews I used my own intuition to recognize this and guide participants into discussions aimed at uncovering their earnest feelings and recollections, as has been advised by Moustakas (1990). For example, during the second interview I asked one participant how he felt about the group, and he replied, “good and stuff,” and looked down at the ball he was twirling. I sensed that perhaps, his feelings towards that group were much more complex than “good” and questioned him further about events he had written about in his journal leading to a discussion about numerous conflicts, their resolutions and his complex feelings surrounding the other members of his group.

A second limitation of this present study in terms of credibility was that not every participant journaled every night. Most participants journaled the majority of the nights, however no participant journaled every night, as was originally requested. As previously mentioned, participants listed long days on the river, personal frustrations, and fatigue as reasons for not journaling. One participant missed over half of the journal entries. Reasons for not journaling were discussed in second interviews, and this information helped to create a fuller picture of participants’ experiences. Thus, even when incomplete, the journals did help to contribute to the overall story. Also, while journals were an important source of data, they were not the primary source. As was previously mentioned, and has been advised by Moustakas (1990), interviews were the main source of data collection, and journals were used mainly to supplement this data.

This present study further addressed these specific limitations and overall credibility in general, in two ways. First, this research used triangulation as a means to promote trustworthiness. Triangulation has been described by Creswell (2007) as the

“use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (p. 202). In the present study, triangulation of both methods and sources was achieved through the use of two different data collection methods (interviews and journals) and six different data sources (the individual participants and myself). Second, the present study used member checks to promote study credibility. Member checks are encouraged by both Creswell (2007) and Moustakas (1990) as a means to promote credibility in qualitative and heuristic studies. Member checks were completed by emailing participants their verbatim interview and journal transcripts as well as their individual depictions and providing them with the opportunity to add or amend my written representation of their reports. The first round of member checks was used to ensure that there were no pieces of raw data that had not been included, while the second round ensured that I had captured the essence of each participant’s experience in my initial analysis. No amendments were made by any of the participants during the first or second round of member checks.

The second area for consideration related to trustworthiness is the concept of transferability. Transferability has been defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as the extent to which the findings of a qualitative study can be transferred to other contexts or settings. The present study addressed transferability by providing in depth descriptions of the context in which the data originated and background contexts on the participants that provided the data. This allows the reader to surmise whether the results are transferable to his/her own situation (Creswell, 2007).

The third area related to trustworthiness, dependability, relates to the research methods being thorough, supported, and well documented (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To



promote dependability in this present study, I ensured that all of the decisions made in the research process were congruent with heuristic “best practices” and were also congruent with the methods of previous heuristics studies. I further promoted dependability by documenting my research process. This was done by keeping a detailed researcher journal, keeping hard copies of the coded interviews and journals, and maintaining electronic copies of all of the transcribed data.

Finally, confirmability was addressed in a variety of ways including triangulation, detailed management of data, and researcher reflexivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The present study attended to ensure confirmability in all three of these ways. The first two methods, triangulation and detailed management of data have already been discussed. The third method, researcher reflexivity is a process of acknowledging the researcher’s influence on the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Regardless of one’s attempts to maintain research objectivity, it is never entirely possible or even desirable. My own process of reflexivity included the use of a personal journal, as was suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). A researcher journal is a log kept during the research process. The researcher uses the log to record experiences, reactions, and assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). My personal journal / log also included the “self-check” attempts that I made to help manage researcher bias, as well as the difficulties I encountered with these attempts. One challenge I encountered in my attempt to manage my own bias was separating my work as an employee of the company and my role as a researcher. The job that I was doing was very emotionally and physically draining at times. Despite this, it was important for me to maintain a level of responsivity to the participants. By reflecting in a researcher log, I was better able to understand my own experiences and perspectives,

including moments of fatigue that could influence my researcher role and “name” and manage for these. For example, I did not schedule an interview on a day that had been particularly challenging for me on a professional/work level. This helped me be more “present,” less biased, and more objective as a researcher. I also needed to be aware of and transparent about the biases I felt towards the experiences of the participants, and the participants themselves. As previously mentioned, I was aware that by experiencing the phenomenon that I was studying, that I had preconceived notions of what participants might experience, and how they might answer my questions. In addition, by the end of the second interview, I had spent at least 50 minutes interviewing each participant, and conversed with them casually at all meal times for the first ten days of the program (while they were at the research site). This contributed to me knowing them on a more personal level, which added to my own personal feelings about who they were as individuals. The aforementioned researcher journal, kept from the time I received ethics approval through to the end of the data analysis phase of the present study, was used to record thoughts, feelings, questions and concerns that I had about the participants, the data and the research process in general. I used the journal to identify assumptions and biases I had in order to take these into account when collecting and analyzing data. The overall process of becoming aware of personal assumptions and biases and focusing on remaining cognizant of them through data collection and analysis is common to recent heuristics studies (Dilts-Harryman, 2007; Leisure, 2007; Taylor, 1996; VanLerberge, 2009).

***Researcher subjectivity.*** Researcher subjectivity refers to the ways that the previous experiences, perspectives and epistemologies of the researcher will influence how they analyze and interpret data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As humans are the

“instruments” used to both collect and analyze data within a qualitative paradigm, the researcher’s own perspectives and experiences will inevitably shape the interpretation of the data (Patton, 2002). Researcher subjectivity can be further categorized into biased subjectivity and perspectival subjectivity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Biased subjectivity refers to “sloppy and unreliable work; researchers noticing only evidence that supports their own opinion, selectively interpreting and reporting statements justifying their own conclusions, overlooking any counterevidence” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 213). Biased subjectivity represents a major limitation of any study. This form of subjectivity was managed by following the methods that were laid out in the initial proposal of this present study that reflect heuristics best practice and by engaging all data collected when the data were analyzed. This means that I read all data in an attempt to code as much data as possible, initially assuming that all data, all written and oral material, held relevance, which has been suggested by Moustakas (1990). Biased subjectivity was also managed by keeping an open mind about what was found in the data and allowing for themes to emerge from data through inductive analysis (Moustakas, 1990).

Perspectival subjectivity can actually strengthen a study’s findings (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Perspectival subjectivity simply refers to the influence that the perspectives of the researcher has on his/her interpretations of the data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As previously discussed, I approached this study with an interpretivist, constructivist lens, meaning that I believed that there are multiple realities that all represent contextualized “truths” (Willis, 2007). My own previous experiences with both participating in, and leading wilderness programs provided me with unique

perspectives into participant experiences related to personal growth and development during wilderness programs in general. I came to understand that many changes can happen to an individual during a program, although changes are not always evident at first glance. My own history with the company also gave me a unique perspective into the way that the company functioned and the philosophies and practices that were inherent in the structure of this company. This “insider role” contributed to my own interpretations of the kinds of activities that happened during a program and the general ways that participants have typically and historically reacted to certain situations on a program. Thus, my perspectives as a participant of a wilderness program and as a guide of wilderness programs, helped shape how I interpreted participants’ experiences. However, while these perspectives effected the ways in which I understood and interpreted the data, I remained cautious not to let these perspectives dissuade me from engaging with all data in a consistent manner – one that was based on the assumption that all data held relevance as previously mentioned. This was also attempted by completing frequent journaling and “self-checks”, as described above, during data collection and analysis (Patton, 2002). Managing for perspectival subjectivity was also promoted through the process of returning to the data after the categorization process was completed, as described in the data analysis section (Moustakas, 1990). This process helped to ensure that the codes and categories accurately reflected the essence of the data (Moustakas, 1990).

**Ethical considerations.** As this study involved exploring the beliefs, values and experiences of several individuals, maintaining a high level of ethical conduct was essential. In a general sense, research is viewed as ethical when it is conducted to serve

the best interests of the participant, both during and after the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For the purpose of this study, ethical considerations including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were all considered and addressed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Also, given that I was an M.A. graduate student, attending Brock University, ethical considerations of this present study addressed the requirements of the Tri-Council Research Ethics Board. More will be said about these specific requirements throughout this next section.

In any research that deals with human subjects, informed consent is a necessary protocol to protect both the researcher and the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann 2009). Furthermore, informed consent is one of the requirements of the Tri-Council Research Ethics Board. As recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), I drafted an informed consent form for this study as a means to ensure that all participants were made aware that they could freely choose to participate in this study or not, and that at any time they had the right to withdraw from the study (see Appendix B). The informed consent form was developed using the template provided by the Brock University Research Ethics Board. The five individuals who volunteered to participate signed and dated the form to acknowledge that they had read and understood their rights. Two of the five participants were under the age of 18, and their parents also signed their informed consent forms. For each participant, one copy of the signed informed consent form was given to the participant to keep, and the other copy was retained by the researcher. Although I included myself in the study as a participant, it was not necessary for me to sign a consent form. Another ethical consideration was how the research process would impact the individual and group experiences of the participants. As is outlined in participant consent

forms (see Appendix A), there were no known risks or negative impacts associated with this study.

Anonymity and confidentiality are also important ethical considerations in heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). While anonymity could not be ensured within the WLP group itself, participant anonymity was protected outside the group. In other words, because of the small sample size and intimate setting of the WLP, all participants and leaders knew who was participating and who was not. However, that said, individual participants were not identified beyond that group and were given pseudonyms to help preserve their anonymity. All information discussed during interviews or in participant journals was not connected to any individual participant. Furthermore, I did not share any information gathered with other staff members or other participants to protect participant confidentiality. The anonymity of the WLP and the company was also maintained by not including any mention of the specific name of the WLP or the company name or any overtly identifying characteristics in any written theses or other written reports.

One final ethical consideration involved the portrayal of participants in the final write-up of a study. When portraying participants, even anonymously, it is important to maintain both as respectful and “non-judgmental” a tenor as possible (Willis, 2007). As the primary researcher, I did my best to be as unbiased as possible toward individuals and the company in any verbal commentary about the study and in any written documentation. As mentioned earlier, I was aware that by experiencing the phenomenon that I was studying, that I had preconceived notions of what participants might experience, and how they might answer my questions. Furthermore, I got to know

participants on a personal level, which added to my own personal feelings about who they were as individuals. To remain as transparent as possible about my personal feelings, and eventual biases, I used a self-check process, as is suggested of researchers in qualitative analysis (Patton, 2002). My self-check process included personal journaling throughout the data collection procedures, as previously mentioned. I journaled before and after I first met the participants, before and after each interview, and at various points throughout my data transcription and analysis. I focused journals on my own feelings of being a researcher, problems that arose, questions that I had, general overviews of data collection, and my own feelings towards participants and their responses in interviews and in journals. While reflecting and journaling, I attempted to “wear” an objective lens, that of an outside observer (Patton, 2002). I became aware that the more time I spent with the participants, the more I felt a connection to them, and that we had a shared experience. My journals after the second interviews with participants were substantially longer than those at the beginning, indicating that I had many more personal feelings and questions surrounding their experiences and their effect on me, as the primary researcher. I used these journals to inform my own recounting of the methods used in data collection and checking for researcher bias. The process of using my journal to check for biases has been described in the limitations section.

In accordance with Brock University research policies, this present study underwent ethics review by the Brock University Research Ethics Board (REB) before any research was undertaken. A research request was submitted to the Brock University REB in May 2009 and was approved by ethics in June 2009.

**Concluding remarks.** The general methodology of heuristic inquiry might appear “whimsical” and unstructured to outside observers at first glance. However, as I have attempted to demonstrate in this section, the processes that were used to complete this form of qualitative research did indeed involve thoughtfulness, and rigour as well as a comprehensive awareness of the study’s limitations and a high degree of ethical conduct. I am confident that the chosen methodology and the methods described in this section have attended to those criteria. The study itself and the results contribute to both an enhanced experience for the wilderness program participants and make a contribution to a gap in the literature related to how people’s knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others are influenced by their participation in a wilderness program. These results are presented next.



### Chapter 4: Results

This chapter will begin with *individual depictions* from each participant, including my own. Each of these depictions starts with participant background information. These participant backgrounds provide context to participant experiences and are commonly used in heuristic inquiry research. These backgrounds include basic demographic information and a brief biographical sketch provided by each participant that further contextualizes their life experiences that lead participants to choose the wilderness program. The majority of each individual depiction is comprised of participant reports about their experiences in the wilderness program. These depictions were constructed from responses to the interviews and written journal reflections, and represent a summary of each participant's experiences. Thus, I have merely formed a readable, summarized narrative of each participant's experiences surrounding the wilderness program.

It should also be noted that the individual depictions leave absent any mention of specific identifying features that would compromise the anonymity of the participants. The names of cities or towns, friends or family members and the participants themselves have been changed. The exception to this is my own individual depiction; information has been left intact to ensure transparency of my own experiences, thoughts and feelings.

The second half of chapter four is the *composite depiction*. This present study will present the composite depiction thematically, outlining the main themes that emerged from each of the individual depictions and the raw data itself as was described in Chapter 3.

**Individual Depictions**

**Erica.** I was 16 years old when I completed my first wilderness program. I had just finished grade 10 at the local high school in Renfrew, Ontario. I had lived in a rural area just outside of Renfrew, Ontario my entire life and had not travelled much outside of that immediate area. I came from a stable, middle class family with my parents still together and a younger brother living at home as well. I would have described myself as academically and athletically-minded. Academics came easily to me, and I always strove to get high grades. I played on a number of sports teams and did numerous individual sports as well. Although I did not have a clear career path, I knew that I would be going to university in some capacity.

I joined the wilderness program for several reasons. First, I was working to get a high school credit. Completing the three-week program meant that the company offering the program would provide participants with a high school credit in leadership, which meant that I could have one more free period the following school year. Second, I was hoping to become more comfortable meeting new people and become more outgoing. I was planning on going to university in only two years and found being in new social situations stressful. I enjoyed making new friends and constantly had meaningful relationships with friends, however, I found it difficult to begin new friendships and step out of my comfort zone into new situations. Third, I was hoping to increase my technical skills in canoeing, portaging, backcountry cooking and general knowledge of backcountry camping. I had never been in a canoe for longer than a couple minutes at the cottage and had never been backcountry camping.

My initial thought on how people in the program would act towards each other was that everyone would become friends instantly. I thought that because we were removed from an urban context and all in a new place together, that everyone would find their own friends really fast. Within the first or second day, I thought that everyone would break into their own groups and stay with small friend groups for the entirety of the program. In my experience, this was a fairly standard summer camp group dynamic. I had been to summer camp before and assumed that the dynamic would be the same on a wilderness program.

When I arrived at the program, I was very nervous. There were so many people, and I did not know anyone. The group was nearly 30 people with all of the leaders. I remember looking around at everyone and thinking that everyone else seemed to be meeting each other and chatting a lot more easily than I was. I was jealous of those people who were conversing with ease.

When we were all introducing ourselves, it seemed that everyone came from really different places from me. Most people were from really wealthy sections of Toronto, Ontario. Judging from what they were wearing and the way they spoke, I could tell that they had a lot more money than my family did and lived a very different, urban lifestyle. By the end of the first day, I did not feel like I had made any connections with anyone. I felt that if I could make just one friend throughout this program, and found just one person who I was comfortable with, then everything would be ok. In the next few days I started to become friends with a couple of the girls that I perceived to be the most similar to me. We started to do everything together and did not make much of an effort to get to know other people in the program. Even with my new friends, I remember

always feeling a little bit nervous and did not want to stand out in any way. I never volunteered for anything, never wanted to do more than was asked of me, and never went out of my way to help out anyone else. I was very unsure of myself socially in that group and was also unsure of my technical skills. Although I had found some friends, I still felt very intimidated interacting with the larger group.

When I was placed in my smaller expedition group, I was not in the same group as the other two girls that I had become friends with. The groups were created so that we could complete our training in smaller numbers during the day. We were to spend from 9:00 AM until 5:00 PM with our groups. There were three groups of girls in the program, and I remember thinking that I was placed in the worst group. I felt like the girls in my group were nothing like me and that we could not and would not become close friends. The other two groups had girls that I perceived to be much cooler, and more similar to me. I spent several days angry that I was in the “loser” group. I went so far as to request to switch groups, but was told that all group assignments were final.

Into the second week, I accepted my fate and decided to try to become friends with the people in my group. I felt that if I was going to be stuck with these people, I might as well try to enjoy myself. When I started to open up to the people in my group I slowly started to see that there were parts of each person that I actually liked. For example, one girl, Lindsay, who I had previously labeled as the “large girl” was really funny and turned even our boring lessons into hilarious jokes. I began to appreciate the different things that people contributed to our group. I also began to notice small things that I had in common with the other girls. Small similarities like having younger brothers, participating in the same sports and loving the same food became topics of

ongoing conversation and helped our relationships to grow. Where I had originally thought of a group of people as completely different from me and not worth getting to know, I began to see friends and companions who were in many ways similar to me, and worth getting to know. I had entered this group seeing the people as an obstacle standing between me and my happiness, however as the days went on, it became clear that being in that group was making me happy. The way I saw myself as part of the group and saw the other girls in the group was quite different from the beginning.

By the end of the second week, I felt more confident both socially and in my technical skills. I was the person who often volunteered first to do dishes, start the fire or do the bear hang. It made me feel good to help out, and I felt respected when I could contribute something that helped out everyone. There was a lot that I still did not know how to do or was not good at, however, I made up for it by working hard at the things I could do. I did not always enjoy the extra work, and there were a number of times that I felt really frustrated with some of the members of my group who had only done the dishes or packed up a gear barrel once. However, in a way, it seemed easier just to do the dishes then to sit and listen to the leaders always talking about responsibility and sharing the work. Also, I still wasn't all that great at paddling and portaging, so I thought that if I was really good at the cooking and cleaning around camp, that no one would notice that I always carried the lightest barrel. In addition to taking on this role of the hard worker, I think that at this point in the program I really liked to be "in the action" and was always going with the people who wanted to play in the rapids, climb up a cliff overlooking the water or stay up until the last person went to bed. I can remember staying up really late on many nights near the middle of the program with some of the people in my group to

talk and laugh; we were always the last people to go to bed. While I had a lot of fun doing these things, I remember feeling in some of these situations like I wasn't really myself and that sometimes I was almost putting on a show for other people, but I really wanted to be liked and not miss out on anything. However, there were many other times, where I felt really connected to certain people in the group. It definitely was not a smooth upward trajectory of us all becoming lifelong friends, as I had assumed it would be. We had good days and bad days.

One example of a good day that I can recall was paddling with this boy, Alex, who I had only spoken to in passing here and there. It was a longer paddling day and we were in a canoe together for the entire day. For the first two hours I don't think either of us said a word, I remember thinking "get me out of here"! At our first break we were eating GORP, and I was picking out the Smarties because I don't like them, and I asked Alex if he wanted them. He looked so relieved when I gave them to him and told me that he was ALWAYS hungry, and he felt like he never got enough food. I was surprised because I felt like I was always so full and he joked with me that it was because I was the size of his cat. With this small conversation starter we talked the whole day and realized that although we seemed like complete opposites on the outside, we were actually really similar in character and shared a similar sense of humour (very dry and sarcastic). By the end of the day, we had our own inside jokes, and were really close for the remainder of the program.

Although I cannot recall a particularly bad day overall, I do remember that it was also around the end of the second week of the program that the group started bickering more than usual. We had a number of small disputes in the first couple weeks, but by the

end of the second week, fights seemed to be more common, and they had more depth to them. Typically, our fights would start in a passive aggressive way over small things, like taking a canoe on a portage, or doing the dishes, or who was sharing a tent with whom, but they often seemed to escalate to larger discussions involving the leaders. One fight at the end of a portage trail was so bad that it culminated in a two hour debriefing as we floated down the river, with nearly everyone in the group crying.

Near the end of the program, I think that the group changed really positively, as did my role in the group. Although it is hard to explain exactly how the group was different, to me, it just seemed as though everything was easier and smoother. People still bickered and grumbled about dishes, but it was more like a joke at that point. Ultimately, I knew that people would step up, and that quarrels were more easily resolved in a friendly way. Personally, I began to feel like I was a leader among my group, which was a new and really positive experience for me. I also began to realize how to fit in and be liked without being someone I was not. I was not filtering my personality to fit a mold, and the people around me still liked me and accepted me. Although I continued to be one of the people who shouldered a significant amount of work I felt that people were looking up to me, and respected my opinion and my newfound skills. I think that the skill that I improved at the most at was building fires, and everyone knew that I could start a fire when no one else could. I also improved significantly in my paddling abilities. I was nowhere near the best paddler in the group, but considering how terrible I was when I had started, my improvement was noticeable. Often people would ask for help to get the fire started, or ask if I would paddle with them that day. I enjoyed being the one who people looked up to and wanted to be around; it made me feel needed and important.

When the program ended, I felt that there were several changes that had happened to me personally, and several changes in how I interacted with the people in my group. Personally, I felt more confident both physically and socially. I was more aware of my own physical capabilities and limitations. I learned that I could rely on other people and that other people could rely on me. Even when I was tired or frustrated, I knew that other people needed me, and it would help me to be strong and carry on. I also felt more confident meeting new people. Even when I perceived people to be very different from me, I was able to get to know them, and find common grounds to build a relationship on. I came away from the wilderness program with the confidence to go into many different social situations and feel comfortable meeting new people.

The changes I felt for the people in my group were also very clear to me. I recall looking back to the beginning of the program and wondering how I had ever felt uncomfortable or unfriendly with any of them. At the end of the program, I felt that those people were like family to me. The relationships seemed at the time to have an unconditional aspect to them, and it felt like these people would be friends for life. I also felt that the friendships I formed were more real than many of the relationships I had with my friends back home. Those people knew who I really was, and I never had to be fake with them anymore. Likewise, I felt I knew who they really were on the inside. I knew those people and they knew me, and I would step outside of my comfort zone, work extra hard and put myself out to make sure they were safe and happy. This was a feeling that I had never experienced before.

In my mind, there were several factors of the program that were integral in these changes I felt in myself and towards others. First, I remember paddling with the other



people in my group. I found that paddling with people gave me a chance to really get to know them one on one. It was a situation where you needed to talk to one another and get to know each other, otherwise you would have a really awkward, boring day.

Second, I found portaging an activity that changed the dynamic of our group. At the beginning of the trip, everyone dreaded the portages. We would all try to carry the lightest things possible. I would always walk as slowly as I could to avoid having to go back for a second trip. The first few days of the trip, it took hours to complete even a short portage. After the first few days, I started to understand that the portage would go a lot more smoothly if everyone carried what he or she could right from the beginning. Although I was not the strongest person, I was capable of lifting more than several other people. I started to carry the heaviest things that I could manage. When I did this, it not only made me feel stronger and more capable, but I also felt good and confident that I was doing my best and didn't have to try and be sneaky. I think that many of the other people in my group shared this mindset. Portaging turned out to be the most challenging activity for our group overall. That challenge brought us a lot closer together and made us work as a team in order to get the portage done and get to our campsite for that night. It made me see that I needed to rely on the other people in my group and that they relied on me.

Third, I found that sharing a tent with other people helped shape how I perceived others in the group. The sustained close living space with other people in the group meant plenty of time to talk to each other at night. This also allowed us to see each other when we were really tired at night and very sleepy in the morning. By being with people at the times during the day when we were not at our best, it helped us to get to know who

the people in our group really were. Because I spent time with people at their most vulnerable times of the day, I knew them on a more intimate level, not to mention our bonding over the hilarious noises that everyone made at night. Furthermore, every night we switched the people that we were sharing tents with. This helped everyone to form close bonds with other people in the group, and made everyone seem included, with no one being left out.

Finally, I think that playing in rapids was really important for our group development. The rapids provided an element of challenge and fun simultaneously. The rapids required that we use teamwork to get through them. They also demonstrated the power of water against one person. I recall one particular rapid that we stopped to play in. It was shallow enough to stand in but deep enough to push you over if you lost your footing. Our group was trying to get across the rapid to jump in from the other side. I remember a few people trying to cross by themselves and being swept downstream. Then we decided to hold on to each other to cross; we were much more successful. We successfully got halfway across when one person slipped. They pulled me down and the person beside me. I remember being really panicked of getting pushed downstream. Just before the three of us went over the ledge that lead downstream, several people grabbed our PFDs and pulled us back into the group. It was somewhat symbolic that even if I slipped, these people would be there to pick me back up. That really helped me to trust the other people in the group, and to feel that they had my back. Playing in the rapids was a situation where we were literally all in it together. We needed to rely on each other for success. Only when we all worked together, could we each achieve success.

When I returned from the program, my parents said that I came back a different person. Much of what I learned about myself and others, I brought back into my daily life. My confidence in myself allowed me to be nicer to people on a daily basis. I had often been guilty of putting people down to make myself seem better, and although I cannot say this never happened again, I do feel as though I was much more conscious of it, and it happened much less. My parents said I was kinder, more generous, and generally treated the people in my life much better. In part, I think this was due to the changes in the way I saw realness and vulnerability of the people on my wilderness program. Just as I could be scared, intimidated or unsure, so too could the people in my program, and the people in my everyday life.

During my wilderness program, I saw those people as who they really were, and was able to look past the labels that society placed on them, and more importantly, the labels that I had originally placed on them. This allowed me to form real, meaningful relationships with them that would last longer than most teenage friendships. I have remained friends with several of these people until today. Years pass without us speaking, yet when we get together it is as if no time has elapsed. When I am with them, it brings me back to that time and place where I changed the way I saw myself and saw other people.

**Marc.** When Marc joined the Wilderness Leadership Program, he was 18 years old and had just graduated from high school. He was planning to attend university in the fall to work towards a bachelor's in engineering. Marc had lived his entire life in a suburb of Toronto, Ontario. He described his family as fairly well off and very academic. His parents were still married and he had one older brother, who would be entering his

third year of university, in engineering also. Marc described himself as a regular guy who always did well in school and is focused on his academic studies. He also described himself as athletic and had been on several sports teams in high school.

Marc came to the WLP with a significant amount of previous wilderness program experience. He had completed four previous wilderness programs, the longest of which was 23 days. All four of these trips were with a different organization. He decided to join this specific program, with the company outlined in this present study because he thought it would be a more challenging program due to its length, leadership component and the difficulty of the river. He hoped to improve his technical skills and push himself physically. In the past, he had enjoyed learning technical skills like whitewater paddling and swift water rescue and predicted that he would have a greater technical skill level than most of the other participants.

Marc reported that he had learned a lot about people and how they act on wilderness programs. He reported that his previous experience would help him to see the big picture during the program, and be a team player earlier on than other members of the group. Marc said that he was fairly certain that he could predict how the group would change over the course of the program. From his past experiences, Marc said he noticed a fairly consistent pattern. He reported that people are very cautious when they are first introduced. After this first initial introductory phase, people start to test each other's personalities to see what different people's limits are. Typically around this time there is a lot of fighting while people sort out their problems. When the problems get resolved, the group is tighter than before. He said that on every single program he had ever been on, this was the pattern.

Overall, Marc described the relationships that develop on a wilderness program as different from those in the regular world because they are on “super speed.” Everything that might happen in a regular relationship still happens, but more quickly due to the prolonged physical proximity. Furthermore, Marc said wilderness program relationships are different because you are constantly in situations where you depend on each other. People are literally in the same boat.

Marc reported that his previous experience also taught him that group members need to have a true understanding of each other if they want to be successful in the program and in their relationships together. He reported that at the beginning of his programs he often felt that he was there to do *his* best and meet all of his goals. However, by the end he would often realize that if people worked together then they will *all* be more successful than if they each just focused on their own individual success. Marc realized that ultimately, he could not do this trip on his own. He needed the other members of the group to get down the river successfully.

At the beginning of the Wilderness Leadership Program, Marc reported that it was clear that everyone was very different. Everyone had joined the program for very different reasons and each was motivated to be there for different reasons. Moreover, he found that there were some people in particular that really stuck out as different. Marc gave the example of Abby sticking out because she was the only girl and described several other noticeable divisions that existed like leader vs. camper, male vs. female, smart people vs. less smart people, and smoker vs. non-smoker. He found these roles to be obvious and segregating. Marc self-identified as a camper, male, smart person and non-smoker. He suggested to me that he perceived himself as more eager than other

members of the group and thought of himself as a positive role model to the other campers. Marc spent most of his time early in the program with what he identified as “the other smart, non-smoker, campers.” The other participants in this group were Trevor and Abby.

During the first few days of the expedition, Marc described how emotions ran high among the group, and he had many feelings, but they did not always make sense to him. Marc used contradictory words to describe the group like fun and silly, but also used words like abrasive, power-struggles and individual. He reported there was a lot of emotional turmoil with other group members that was surfacing, but he was unsure of what was causing it. Specifically, he had noticed someone crying, but he was not sure why and not sure how to help. It was a confusing time for Marc. Marc described that his past experiences should tell him how this group would develop, but he felt like it was not going the way it should.

Within a few days of arriving at the river, Marc reported feeling very overwhelmed with the amount of time that he was spending with the people in his group. He reported that there was no personal time and found people in the group to be very frustrating. He wanted to spend as much time as possible alone. Marc focused on negative descriptive words like frustrating, hierarchy, selfish, long and hard. He found himself becoming very snappy and rude, and did not like his own behaviour, but he could not stop himself. The group seemed to be constantly bickering, which was putting him even more on edge. Marc also recorded that he felt other people in the group were in a similar place to him.

Marc wrote in his journal during the first week of trip that he was finding physical aspects of the trip frustrating too. Specifically, when the group would be paddling, everyone wanted to make it as easy on themselves as possible. Certain people were always worse than others, and he found himself frustrated by the people holding the group back.

Marc reported that paddling problems, as well as the stress that the group was feeling over food began to lead to the smaller fights escalating. Marc admitted that at the beginning of the program he had predicted that there would be fights that would lead to a stronger group, however at that point, he was wondering if the group would ever stop fighting. Marc recalled several fights that were big and people got very angry and upset. However, he also reported that through all the emotions brought on by the fighting, the group started to understand each other, and really know each other, and there was a sense of understanding and acceptance coinciding with frustration and anger. Despite the frustration that Marc described due to the many fights, Marc also reported that the result was that he knew the people in his group better than he knew anyone else in the world. He reported that it almost never happens in the real world, but during the program he got to see who they really were. When he saw the real versions of the other people, and really understood and appreciated them, the expedition got easier mentally. It was easier for him to interact with other people, and made him happier.

Around the halfway point of the program, Mark described how the group had a couple days of really challenging portages and long days of paddling. He found that these days helped to bring the group closer together and end some of the bickering. Despite small setbacks here and there, he felt overall, the group's efficiency was

improving during these challenges. Marc further reported that certain people who had been the most difficult to work with early on in the program, were becoming easier to work with. He described having to lead one day with another group member that he had argued with a lot with earlier on in the program. He reported that this was a great experience that went really smoothly, and made him see some positive qualities in his teammate that he had not noticed before.

Nearing the end of the expedition, Marc began to use more positive words to describe the group like efficient, team-like, powerful, determined, strong, durable; although, he still used words like abrasive. He reported that he still had some challenges with the group, however for the most part his thoughts were positive. He also discussed how through much of the trip, the relationships he had with his group members was like a roller coaster, constantly moving up and down.

In his last few journal entries, Marc described how the people around him did not stand out as much based on what they were. Specifically, he mentioned how Abby seems to be just one of the guys. He found that he no longer looked at her as a different entity. She became more than just her label as “the girl.” He reported that the people around him were not just the strangers from the beginning of the program, but a real family. At the beginning of the program, the relationships all felt forced and fake, but for better or worse, at the end of the program they were real and natural.

When Marc reflected on his different roles in the group throughout the program he described himself as more enthusiastic and more experienced in the beginning than most of the other people in the group. He was always the first one to volunteer and try new things. He thought that people judged him as that. Because of this role, he felt like he



was always taking on more work than others and that others would look to him to pick up the slack. He reported that he found this to be frustrating at times.

Marc described that throughout the entire trip, he worked really hard. While this frustrated him for a large portion of the program, by the end of the program he described a high sense of personal accomplishment for all that he had achieved on the trip.

Marc also reported that the struggles he faced personally and with other members of the group made him stronger and made his own successes more meaningful. Marc found that overall, he gained more confidence in his technical skills, which allowed him to help others more. In turn, helping others made him feel good, and it made him want to help even more; it was like a cycle.

When Marc reflected on the specific elements of the program that contributed to the shifts in the way he interacted with the group and the changes within himself, he found that the time the group spent at the study site set them back as a group. It was only when they got away from other people and civilization, and onto the river or the expedition that things started to change for the better. He described how “there is so much uninterrupted time together, with no distractions from the outside world, it lets you see people for who they really are.”

Marc described that when the group got to the river, the setting was breathtaking. The places they saw were unlike anything he had ever seen before. It was so wild and beautiful. It was, in part, the complete wildness of the place that Marc reported helped the group to come to rely on each other the way that they did. Marc discussed how when the group was on the river and removed from society, they came to rely on people around them and a team mentality began to develop. Marc described how it became clear that on

the river, if you are not acting as a team, there are bigger consequences to not getting along.

Overall, Marc, found that the more physically challenging an activity was, the, closer it brought the group. He recalled that slow or easy days meant more bickering and arguments. Marc gave the example of portaging as an area in which the group really developed. At the beginning, during portages people were snappy and angry and everyone was just taking their own stuff, so that they could be finished the quickest and could relax while other people finished carrying their own stuff. At some point it seemed that the group just realized what everyone had to do to get the whole portage done more quickly. People started helping other people. Personally, this gave Marc more confidence to take heavier things, because he started to feel that people would help him if he was tired. The group trusted each other and it gave them all more strength. Marc also described a day where he rescued two people from a rapid. This made him feel very powerful and a sense of protectiveness over the other two people. He described how those two group members trusted that he was there for them, and that made him feel great.

In his final interview, Marc reported that he struggled to describe what the experience meant for him. He said that the experience was hard to verbalize; it was everything. Marc described that he had learned many things on the program about himself and about others. What Marc learned from wilderness trips in the past and this current wilderness trip, can be applied to any group setting where he needs to meet new people and work together to achieve a common goal. Moreover, he found that other members of the group also learned and grew on this trip. Even people who were reluctant

learners seemed to learn something, and he described the learning process as inevitable. Marc said that he personally learned a lot about the other people on his trip, but moreover he learned a lot about people and human nature in general. He learned to be patient and to always think about the bigger picture.

Overall, he appreciates people and things and looks at them in a different way. The program has taught him to try to understand why people do things and what their actions mean. He knows now that when someone acts a certain way, they are trying to tell him something. It is really important to listen and watch to know what they are trying to communicate. Even though people might be really different from him, they still have valuable things to say, even though their opinions might be different.

Furthermore, Marc discussed how he learned to enjoy how people are not all the same. He reported that he learned that different people need different things, and many people just think differently. It might be easier to surround yourself with people similar to you, but having people challenge the way you see things, and introduce you to something new is amazing. Marc described how he learned to appreciate the uniqueness of the people around him, and found that this is important in general.

Marc also described how, although he personally struggled the first couple of days, he made a decision to try to be positive. He found that if he was positive, it really helped him but it also helped other people too. He remembered within the first few days of arriving at the river that he put on a brave face for the group because he knew they needed it. It was at this time that he realized that he had the power to change people's moods. He said it made him feel powerful in a good way to know that he can choose what the atmosphere of the entire group is. This also made Marc feel like he had a

specific role to play. It was like the group gave him this purpose, and it made him feel valued. Feeling good about his contributions also gave Marc more confidence in himself, and gave him the courage to try new things he was unable to do at the beginning of the program. Even though his role was emotional and mental he felt that he became a better paddler and portager because he knew people respected the role he played, and would be there to help him if he needed it.

Marc felt that at the end of the program, he understood what it truly meant to work as a team. He reported that that in a wilderness context, the team can never be successful unless all members are working together, and feel important. When one person feels down, or gets hurt it has a large impact on everyone else in the group also. It will slow the group down altogether, and make your experience less positive.

**Jason.** Jason's thoughts while on the trip component of the program are not entirely complete. Journal entries were only completed sporadically and with minimal thought and effort. The few entries that were completed have been incorporated into this individual depiction, however most of the information has come from his first and second interviews.

Jason was a 16 year-old high school student from Montreal at the time of the Wilderness Leadership Program. He was a self-proclaimed troublemaker, and reported that he enjoyed hanging out with the "wrong crowd." Jason labeled himself as not very capable in academic endeavours, and admitted to failing several courses in high school. He also reported that his teachers hated him because he is loud and stupid. Jason had recently been in trouble with the law due to drug and theft related charges. Jason's

parents are separated, and he has no siblings. He reported that he did not see his mother very often, and that he fought very often with his father, with whom he lived.

Jason did not come to the Wilderness Leadership Program with any previous wilderness program experience. He had never done anything like this program before. When asked why he came to the program, he replied that he was required to by his father. After he was arrested, his father gave him the choice to attend the Wilderness Leadership Program, or attend a juvenile detention centre. At the beginning of the program, Jason was not overly excited to be there, and reported that he was only doing the program to appease his father. Jason reported that he loved the city; he found that in the city there were very few challenges, and he enjoyed that feeling of not being challenged and being comfortable.

Jason was looking forward to completing the program and being able to go back to the city to hang out with his friends. He said that he knew that there were some things he was supposed to learn on this program but that he did not need to take this seriously. He thought that there would be some good moments throughout the program, but overall, he was most excited to be finished and go home.

Jason stated that if there was value in the wilderness program, it was in being successful when faced with challenges. He described experiencing success as a mental high five. He reported that he feels better about himself when he achieves something. He thought that going through rapids during the program would help provide the chance for challenge and success. Furthermore, he predicted that the whole expedition would provide a challenge for him by virtue of being in a wilderness context. He predicted that

it would be really hard not to be able to text his friends in the city everyday and go down to the corner store to get food.

Jason was also very nervous about several aspects of the program. Specifically, he was nervous about completing the solo component of the program. The thought of being alone for three days made him feel very nervous. He also said that he was nervous about how he would fit into the group. Jason reported that he did not really know anyone at all, and that the group is good, and fine, but that all the members of the group are not really themselves; that they have not shown their true colours. Jason predicted that no real relationships could form until people really show each other who they are.

Despite reporting that he did not know people's true colours yet, he reported that he knew that several of the other participants were really different from him and found several of the dynamics of the group weird. Specifically, he picked out one participant as a "Boy Scout type," and Abby as "the girl." He also reported that the division of the leaders and the campers was annoying. He did not like how the leaders were in charge and the campers were treated like children. Jason also found that there was a division between the people that smoked and the people that did not smoke. Jason self-identified as a member of the "camper and smoker group" reporting that he spent most of his time with the other smokers, and the "bad kids." He spent most of his time with James and Chad, but described James as his only real friend on the program. While he asserted that the other group was more uptight and serious, he described his group as more "relaxed" and fun. He could not predict what impact these specific people and group divisions would have on the program, but he found them odd all the same. When asked about the

relationships he had made so far in the program, he made a joke and quickly changed the subject.

When Jason was asked about where he fit into the group, he reported that in general, he doesn't usually have a specific role in a group, but can sometimes be the "crazy one" in a group. Jason reported that he had ADHD which is why is crazy and that people should just accept his craziness because that is who he is. He predicted that his role would change over the course of the program. Jason said it would be nice if he could play a different role than the one he is in, but did not know what to change to or how to do it.

Although there was limited information that came from Jason's journals, during the program, Jason did record several pictures and metaphors describing the group throughout the program. Early on in the program, Jason drew a rubrics cube and wrote that the group was like a rubrics cube, every one is their own colour at the beginning. He discussed this metaphor again at the end of the program and said that at the end of the program the group was like a mixed up rubrics cube, where everyone has a bit of everyone else in them. A second metaphor that Jason provided was that at the beginning of the trip, each person in the group was a separate ring, but by the end of the trip they formed a really strong chain.

When Jason sat down for his second interview, he apologized for not completing his entire journal. He reported that he was frustrated for a large portion of the program and could not get his journal finished on most nights due to frustrations with the program in general. He reported that for much of the program, the group argued a lot and that he was often centre of many arguments, which caused him a lot of stress. He often felt that

people would get annoyed with him, and he felt people were always telling him what he could not do. He recalled one particular argument he had with a leader being several hours long and focused on the way he interacted with people. Jason found that although the argument was not enjoyable while it was happening, he was finally able to understand the leader's point and was able to learn from it to improve his interactions. Jason also said that he learned that sometimes he needs to pick his battles and not start a conflict over everything.

Jason also reported that many of the arguments the group had were over food. Everyone was really stressed over food, and it was a consistent topic of discussion. Some people felt that food should always be divided equally, and some people wanted to make sure that food was divided based on weight and how hard people worked that day. He described his own view that if he brought extra food, or found food during the expedition (like picking berries), then he should not have to share. He reported that in his mind, people's stress over food, including his own, clouded their vision of what was really important, but even after realizing this, he still felt extremely protective over his own food. Jason reported that arguments and stress over food were present fixtures for the entire expedition.

Jason found that near the end of the expedition, arguments occurred less often, but also were handled better. The group learned how to discuss an issue, instead of blaming people. Jason said he found it very difficult early on in the program to deal with his frustrations and conflicts with people. He reported that he did not share his feelings as much as he should have. When the group started to have positive discussions about their feelings, he reported that it became a lot easier and felt safer to share with people. He



also found that it felt much better to let his feelings out, because it is really hard and negative to hold a grudge on trip. Whereas, near the beginning of the program, arguments consisted of singling people out and accusing them, over time, the group learned to listen to everyone's opinions, and respect them, even if they disagreed. Arguing over food still happened, but it seemed to Jason that it was in a more positive way.

During the second interview, Jason reflected on this program as life changing. He said that he learned more about himself, the people around him and life in general than he ever could have in the city. He felt that he had changed and his perception on life had changed. Jason gave specific examples of how certain campers taught him different things. For example, he discussed how Trevor told him about meditation and Buddhism. He reported that even though he will probably never be a Buddhist, he valued what Trevor shared with him. Furthermore, Jason reported learning the importance of treating different people differently, according to who they were and what they liked. He said that he would talk about different things with each person of the trip. For example, when he was with Marc he would talk about books. Although Jason felt he did not know a lot about books, he knew they were important to Marc and would make an effort to understand his interest.

Jason also reported that he understood the people of his group differently than he did at the beginning of the program, on a more real level. Jason reported that because he could now understand these people better, he was able to treat them better. He gave the example of fellow camper, James, having low blood sugar. He reported that "when James was getting grouchy, his blood sugar was probably low, so I would go easy on

him. I realized that he is not a bad person, but he does get snappy because of a medical condition.”

Jason reported that he felt much closer with the people on the trip than he did at the beginning. He discussed a greater level of trust and intimacy with these people than with other relationships he has had in the past. Jason attributed this to the necessity of trusting them and his willingness to share meaningful parts of his life with them. Jason felt like he had several meaningful conversations about who he was and why he was like the way he was. He felt that the people on his trip truly understood why he acted the way he did. Jason also reported that other group members told him that he was more “deep” than he was before. Other people had noticed the changes in him and he reported being proud of this attention.

Jason also described that his view on relationships has changed. He reported that many of his current and past relationships had been neglected, specifically, his relationship with his father. Jason reported that he had a valuable opportunity to take everything he learned about relationships on the trip and apply them to his existing relationships. In his relationship with his father, Jason hoped to understand and appreciate his father’s opinions and point of view. He said that already, he had realized how much pain and suffering he has caused his Father. With a better understanding of the impact his actions have on others, he wanted to move forward, to create a more meaningful relationship with his Father. Jason also reported that he sees the benefits and value of forming real and meaningful relationships with people and not settling on superficial and fake relationships.

Jason reported that he realized that if he wants to have better relationships with people, then there are things that he will need to change. He learned that he needs to watch how he talks to people and be aware of his actions on others. Jason stated that he hoped to take more responsibility for personal interactions with others in the future.

Jason also reported that he came to the realization that working together ultimately made everything easier. At the beginning of the program, Jason found that he hated certain activities, like portaging, and would just try to get down with it as quickly as possible. However, Jason said that by the end of the program, he realized that everything was easier when people worked together. Even on the activities he did not enjoy, like portaging, if he worked hard, the group would be done more quickly and they could get off the trails with all the mud and bugs.

Jason reflected on several factors of this trip that helped affect the changes he saw in himself and in how he saw those around him. He found that the setting had a lot to do with his learning experience because the wilderness pushed his limits constantly. He also reported that the wilderness made him mature more quickly and understand himself better. He reported that he appreciated everything and everyone in his life much more than he had at the beginning of the program. Jason also found that paddling with different people was important to developing his relationships with them. Jason reflected on paddling with specific group members for entire days. He likened this to reading a book about this person, filled with all their experiences. He appreciated being able to share in all those experiences and learn from them.

For Jason, another important aspect of the program was nighttime at the campsites. One important night Jason remembered was a rainy night, where the whole

group was laughing about a fight they had the night before. He recalled that everyone was soaking wet, and were all trying to start a fire together. Jason reported that sitting around the fire at night was when people opened up the most and that there was a good vibe around the fire at night.

Near the end of his second interview, Jason made the powerful statement:

I can honestly say that I would rather have these people on trip than anyone else. Here's why. I found it was a great group set-up, and if any of those people wasn't there I wouldn't be the same person I am now. I've learned life lessons from all of them. I just appreciate them so much.

**Trevor.** Trevor came from Montreal, Quebec. He was entering his final year of high school and was not sure of what the future would hold for him. He lived with his mother and father and a younger sister. Trevor described his family as very close to one another. He described himself as a wise soul, and that he has a better grasp on the important things in life than many of his peers. Trevor reported that he was intelligent, although he did not often excel in traditional academic settings. He reported feeling as though he had a lot of insight into his relationships with others and thought of himself as very intuitive to other people's needs. Trevor had been on two wilderness programs in the past, and completed several personal backcountry expeditions. Before his participation in the WLP, his longest wilderness program had been 14 days. Coming into the WLP, Trevor rated himself as fairly experienced with wilderness programs, and reported that he had learned a lot from past programs that he could use during the WLP. Trevor decided to join the WLP to increase his level of certification and paddling skills so that he could feel more confident taking personal trips with friends and family. Trevor also joined the WLP to leave behind the distractions and baggage that come with urban life, to give him the freedom to create his own boundaries and discover who he is. He

predicted that he would become more comfortable with who he is, and be able to evaluate and ameliorate how he interacts with others.

At the beginning of the program Trevor reported that his previous experience with wilderness programs provided him with greater insight into his own role within a group as well as understanding the development of certain groups. Trevor stated, “I really started to come into a leadership role at a young age.” He labeled himself as a leader in most of the groups he has been part of, and predicted that he would assume a leadership role in the WLP group as well.

Trevor noticed several immediate divisions in the WLP group at the beginning of the program. First, he found there was a division between campers that smoked cigarettes and campers that did not smoke. This was a physical separation, as the smokers would often need breaks where they would physically remove themselves to smoke. Second, there was a physical separation of Abby, the only girl on the program. She was visibly different and also slept in a separate tent, which further separated her. Third, there was an obvious separation between campers and guides. Trevor reported that the hierarchy was well established during daily activities, and was furthered by their separate tent at night. Trevor self-identified as being part of the non-smoker, camper group. While he was in the male group, he reported that this did not stop him from spending time with Abby, the only female, during the day. In addition to Abby, Trevor also spent most of his time with Marc. Trevor reported that his peer group was “more responsible than the other group” and that the remaining three campers were not taking their training seriously enough, specifically whitewater rescue and first aid training. Trevor also reported that the other camper group struggled at the beginning of the

program as they were not as physically fit and did not have the same level of experience as the people in his group.

Trevor also reported that along with the physical divisions of the group, divisions also existed among personality types. Trevor reported that there was tension due to these conflicting personalities. As the program progressed, Trevor described the tension as “rising quickly.” Trevor noted that everyone got on each other’s nerves and there was very little patience for the differences in other people’s personalities. Trevor reported that it was necessary to create bonds with the people on his program to ease this tension and make the trip more enjoyable for him and other members of the group. Trevor created relationships with each person by finding a common ground, and started to develop their relationship from shared interests.

Trevor reported that throughout the first half of the program, that the group’s interactions presented a repeating pattern of fight, resolve, fight, resolve. He reported that when one argument was over, another seemed to follow in its wake. However, despite the group’s many disagreements, they were mostly “surface arguments” and felt that the group was bonded on a primal level. Trevor linked this to a metaphor of the group as a “knife slicing through butter; they are sharp, but they haven’t cut anything that can’t be mashed back together.” These reported ups and downs corresponded chronologically to Trevor’s depiction a mix of positive and negative feelings in his trip journal. He sketched a rose with thorns to depict the group as beautiful, but also hurtful. He also provided the metaphor of the group as “walking in a forest.” He elaborated on this by describing the group as ultimately balanced and at peace, with so much beauty, yet he was always aware of some lurking danger.

Trevor discussed how he often felt lonely near the beginning of the program, not having anyone else that was similar to him. This feeling of being different remained for the entirety of the program, however, over the course of the program Trevor developed the sentiment that even though he was very different from everyone else in his group, somehow, he fit in. This sense of belonging corresponded to finding his role in the group. Trevor described his role in the group as a leader. He described this role as very subtle, leading the others of the group without them realizing he was doing so.

In addition to finding his role in the group, Trevor reported that he had changed in several ways over the course of the program. Trevor felt that while his technical skills were improved, the majority of his growth was in the area of social interaction with others. Specifically, Trevor also felt that wilderness programs helped him to realize that ultimately, it was personally easier for him to develop positive relationships with his group. He reported, “you need to get along with everyone and try to develop these bonds, because it’s going to be a lot harder for you to spend a month and a half with people you hate.” He credited the changes he saw in himself to the people that accompanied him on his journey. Trevor described himself as a growing tree; everyone around him provided something that he needed to grow.

Trevor reported that his view of his group members changed three or four times over the course of the program, each time he unpeeled another layer of their personality. He stated that nearing the end of the trip, he was really appreciating his group members for who they really were, and that he was being appreciated in return. The program changed the way he perceived the members of his group, and thus, it changed the way he

treated them. In the end, he was thankful for the mix of different people on the program, as he found that diverse groups provided balance, and strengthened the group.

Similarly to the shift he noticed in the way he was seeing and interacting with others, Trevor expressed how the other members of the group were interacting differently as well. He reported a sense of amazement at how differently everyone acted towards each other. He expressed regret that the group could not have started out at that level of respect and support.

Trevor reported that the personal changes he had noticed, as well as the shifts in the way the group interacted with one another could be attributed to several factors of the program. Trevor placed the most importance on the challenges of the program. He felt that the challenges were integral to group bonding. Trevor also stated that specific events were important to the way people interacted. One such event he discussed was paddling in a canoe with a single person and being physically separated from the group. Trevor reported that when this situation occurred with different members of his group, it allowed him to have a long amount of uninterrupted time with one person. Trevor recalled having the most meaningful and in depth conversations with his group members while paddling alone with them on long sections of flat water, where all the canoes in the group would become very spread out. This situation also allowed the two people to physically see that they were dependant on each other to get from one place to another.

Another specific event that promoted positive group interactions were evenings that the entire group spent together. Trevor placed importance on talking and singing around the campfire, as well as staying up late with the group playing cards and reflecting on the day. Trevor recounted several memorable evenings with the whole group, or just



one or two members of the group relaxing and talking until the blazing fire had burned down to embers.

A third situation that Trevor placed importance on was mealtime. Trevor reported that the entire group placed a strong focus on food. When they were not preparing food or eating food, they were talking about food. Trevor found that it gave them all something common to discuss. He stated that the group's constant focus on food was at times detrimental to group cohesion, when individuals worried about not getting enough food or having the food divided up equally. However, on the whole, he reported that meal times, and conversations centering on food were events that bonded the group along common ties. He reported that although there were many things that the group did not agree on, the importance of food and the group's obsession with food was something they all had in common.

Overall, Trevor reported that he looks at meeting people differently now. He said he felt more comfortable being himself when meeting new people. Although people might be very different from him, he reported that he felt that others will see the unique things he has to offer, and that he is more capable of seeing this in others as well. He summarized this as an ability to "more easily find the good in people."

**James.** James was 20 years old at the time of the WLP and lived with his mother in Toronto, Ontario. He was a recent high school graduate. He was unable to finish high school when he was 18 because of several mental health concerns, including a diagnosed anxiety disorder. When he was 20, he went to adult high school to finish his diploma. James was searching for the next step in his life and felt that a wilderness program would

help him to ameliorate his interactions with his peers and gain some confidence in himself.

James was also hoping to gain some outdoor technical skills to explore the career possibilities of an outdoor adventure guide. James had no previous experience with wilderness programs. He was hoping to complete a four-month training program with another company after the culmination of the WLP. He was required by the other company to complete a course that was a minimum of one month long to ensure that he could handle the four-month program.

At the beginning of WLP, James did not feel confident in his physical abilities or his social skills. He expressed that he had a constant fear of not fitting in in social situations, and found participating in a wilderness program especially stressful in that regard. He described the process of trying to fit in as very tiring. With this group, he was concerned that he was too different from the other people to form friendships. According to James, this was due mainly to his lower social status and his lower level of education than the others. James reported that he was set apart from the group and felt very alone at the beginning of the program. James spent most of his time early in the program with Chad and Jason. This was mainly due to the fact that they all smoked. However, James still reported that he did not really belong to any group. James also described how most of the other participants looked down on him and were more competent in their technical skills and also in their social skills, with the exception of Jason. James articulated a desire to be more like the other participants and wished to be more accepted.

James predicted that he would enjoy the challenge of the swift water rescue course and the other technical skills based training. However, he was not looking

forward to the teamwork aspects of the courses, as he was not used to working in a team. However, despite his reservations and nervousness about working with others, James was committed to try to create meaningful relationships and lasting friendships. He thought that even though he was very different from everyone in the group that sharing unique experiences with them would break down those differences. He reported that creating lifelong friendships was possible but was still skeptical that it would happen for him.

James reported that, in addition to being an outsider, he noticed that the other people in the group were very closed off from one another. He predicted that the group would open up and come together over the course of the program, however, he reported that this could not happen until the group learned to trust each other. James expressed that the best way to get the group to trust each other was to do physical trust activities like trust falls. Furthermore, he predicted that helping each other on portages and in rapids would contribute to physical trust as well. If this level of physical trust could be established, then the group would start to mentally trust each other. James also reported that it would be important for the group to trust each other on the river because if something were to go wrong, it would be important for everyone to know that the other people had their back.

When the group arrived at the river, James described how he still did not like or respect anybody in the group. He reported that everyone's opinions were so different from his that it was extremely challenging to get along. After a few days on the river, James still found that he was not fitting in. He reported that people did not like him, and he was very nervous of being his "true self." He reported feeling like he was constantly pretending to be someone else so that others would like him. James described himself as

the rotten apple in the group, while most other people were shining, he was not succeeding, and everybody realized it.

A week into the expedition, James described that he still felt that he was an outsider and although he had come to respect everyone in the group, that he did not get that respect back. He reported feeling like the group labeled him, and although he was trying to fit in, people were not accepting him. Furthermore, no one listened to what he had to say.

James reported that even after the first week on the river that the group was not progressing and trusting each other. He was aware of the challenges they would face ahead and worried that they would not be able to face them as a group. As the days went on, James began to describe the group in an increasingly negative and individualized way. He used words like dishonest, confusion, tedious, rejected, stupid and angry.

At the halfway point of the trip, James reported that the group was still not acting as he felt a group should. He reported that people were keeping secrets from him and that everyone was only looking out for themselves. James reported that this was partly due to the lack of food. Everyone was incredibly stressed over food, and it was dominating every aspect of the trip. Several of James' journal entries focused mainly on food stress, and he discussed his own feelings of anxiety over food. In his mind, the majority of the fighting and bickering was over food, and everyone was concerned about getting appropriate portions. James expressed his regret about joining the Wilderness Leadership Program and wanted to return home. James reflected on a conversation he had at this point in the expedition with one of the leaders. During the discussion the leader spoke about trying to focus on the positive aspects of the program, and challenged James to take

responsibility for his actions and feelings. After this discussion, James decided to try to be more positive. James described this conversation as very important for him.

In the days following this discussion, James reported realizing that he, as well as other members of the group, were all responsible for the negativity that had existed on the expedition so far. He reported that he began to see the positives in his group members more easily. He also reported that he could no longer blame the group for ostracizing him and that he needed to take responsibility for his own actions. For the remainder of the program, James reported that there were good days and bad days for him, but there were fewer bad days as the program progressed. He described that when he chose to exist in a more optimistic and open manner, he was able to change in positive ways.

James reported that he noticed many changes in himself physically, mentally and socially. Physically, James reported he felt healthier and also acquired many new technical skills throughout the program such as white water rescue and paddling. He found that many of the skills he acquired during the program were not skills that could be explicitly taught; they needed to have the right setting to emerge. He reported that the wilderness context was essential to allow certain skills to emerge.

James also described that he learned so much about himself and about other people on this program. He found that he was a different person than he was a month before and expressed how he wished he could do the whole course over having the knowledge and skills he gained. James reported that he felt confident that he could carry his newfound skills with him into the outside world. Specifically, he hoped to begin to trust people more easily and trust that people are good. James also reported that he learned how to be with people that are different from him. When he realized that the

people on this program were different, he tried to hide his true self and be who he thought they wanted him to be. However, at the end of the program, he felt confident being himself and hoped to go into new social situations as himself right from the beginning. James said that after he got over that initial fear of rejection, he was better able to realize his own potential.

In addition to his own changes during the expedition, James also reported that the group learned to trust each other more and that people personally trusted him. Although the trust was difficult to establish, it was very rewarding once he gained it. He also reported that this trust was the first step of people on the expedition acting like a real group. Once this trust was established, James reported that everyone began to become a truer version of themselves. Everything began to improve once people removed their “masks.” James also reported that the people in the group were kinder to each other by the end of the program. Whereas at the beginning of the program, people would present their opinions as arguments and refuse to hear each other, by the end of the program, people would show interest in the way other people saw things.

James reported that there were certain elements of the wilderness program that were important to these changes that he noticed in the group and in himself. James reported that often the days where they were able to relax contributed to positive shifts in the way the group interacted. There was nothing to distract from getting to know each other and prolonged personal interactions. Contrarily, James also reported that the challenge of the trip brought people together. Portaging specifically was one of these challenges. James recalled that on a particular portage, he was really struggling, and

Marc stopped and turned back to help him James thought “why would he help me? He got all muddy to help me, and it just changed my whole outlook, instantly.”

Overall, James reported that the people on the trip with him were not the type of people that he would normally have chosen to hang out with, however, he saw them differently at the end of the program. He described how he felt these people were part of his family and likes the thought that they were just waiting somewhere out in the world to be discovered. He reflected that perhaps there are millions of potential families out there in the world, waiting to be welcomed into his life.

James also described how every person was essential to the group dynamic, and everyone affected the group dynamic. The group changed so much when any of them were not around. James reported that in the beginning of the program, they were just strangers to him. He felt that he only knew them from the outside. He described Marc as the smart kid, and Abby as the girl. Everyone fit into their own box and were judged from the outside. James realized that to truly know people and treat them with respect, he needs to look past the box they fit into, and get to know the true version of them. James reported that he would take this learning back into his everyday life, stating, “I want to take what I learned from this experience, and not only apply it to everyday life, to other programs, to work, to relationships, to family, to everything.”

Looking back at the program, James understood that it was extremely challenging for him, both socially and physically. However, he could do it all over again if he would, and there are no other people he would rather do it with.

**Abby.** Abby was 18 years old when she joined the WLP. She lived in a small town in central United States where she was entering her final year of high school, and

was planning to attend university a year later. She described her home as a great place to grow up and lived with both of her parents. She reported having good relationships with her family and her friends. Abby described herself as social, friendly and outgoing and had been involved in several clubs and teams throughout her life. Abby had completed three previous wilderness programs ranging from 14 – 35 days. All three previous programs had been with the company discussed in this present study. All of Abby's past program experiences had been very positive. Abby described positive memories from each of these programs, highlighting the guides, the others campers and the feeling of sharing a special and unique experience with other people. Abby joined the Wilderness Leadership Program to have another positive experience like those previous, but also to push herself in new ways. Abby described how the WLP was a new type of challenge, both physical and mental. She noted that she was looking forward to improving her physical skills and gaining certifications. More than anything else however, Abby joined the WLP program push herself, and have the satisfaction of knowing she could complete such a challenging program. Abby was in a unique position on the WLP as the only female participant.

In her initial interview, Abby often referred to her previous program experiences as a source of insight into how the WLP group would grow and change, and how their relationships would evolve. When questioned about her experience and the ways in which relationships developed on wilderness programs, she reported that the relationships that developed on wilderness programs are more "real" than many of those that we have in our daily lives. She described that on these programs, people developed meaningful relationships when they figured out that they have a unique role to offer the group, and



they feel valued in this role. She further described this as everyone having his or her own “niche.”

Abby reported that in spite of having really positive experiences on her last three programs, she was still unsure of her own specific niche and was hoping to figure that out on this program. She reported that even though she recalled how people interacted on the last programs, she had no idea how this group would interact and evolve. However, her previous experiences, and the limited interactions that the WLP group had already had during the first day of the program, led her to predict that there would be a huge conflict at some point in the program due to the different personalities.

Even with conflict, Abby noted that overall, wilderness programs helped her understand people better, and understand their actions. In her experience, oftentimes, conflicts helped people to become who they really are; once people show the “real” them, everyone understands each other better. Thus, even if this group came into conflict, Abby was confident they would come out as a stronger group because of it.

At the outset of the program, Abby reported on people’s differences being very noticeable. She was personally concerned about being the only female camper. She was not sure what kind of dynamic this would create and how it would affect group interactions, but she predicted there would be times when it would make her feel uncomfortable. She reported that instead of the group addressing this issue, and discussing the difference in the open, it was just ignored. She found this created an awkward tension, because the difference of gender was obvious. This tension continued for a large part of the program and Abby reported feeling ostracized because she was the only girl. The whole group was male dominated and Abby described the group early on

in the program as loud, crude, slow and disorganized. Abby reported how the feminine characteristics of a female dominated trip were not present. Her difference of gender was exacerbated by the fact that she was placed in a tent by herself. However, even though she often felt alone, she attempted to use this to ultimately gain independence and strengthen herself mentally and physically.

Apart from her difference in gender, Abby reported that the differences among male campers were also very evident. Everyone was very different from each other. They all came from very different backgrounds and had very different goals in life. Abby reported that she spent most of her time with Marc and Trevor. She also reported spending time with Chad, although he was mostly in the “smoker” group. Abby asserted that the individuals she spent time with were “the more responsible ones” and within this group, she reported being the most responsible. She reported that the group that smoked often excluded themselves because of their frequent smoking breaks, where they would walk far away from everyone else and have their own conversations. Within the smoking group, there was one particular camper that was so different from the others, that it almost made her difference of gender seem less obvious at times. She reported that when people were casting him as the outsider, she was more accepted.

Abby reported that early on in the expedition, the group faced several physical challenges. These challenges were multiplied by a lack of group cooperation. She said that during these challenges, the weaknesses of each group member became evident. She felt that she and others began to judge people based on weakness. Personally, she also felt judged because of her physical challenges as the physically weakest member of the group.

Another challenge that the group faced was food stress. A couple days into the program, everyone was concerned about who was getting more than the other. Numerous fights broke out over when they would be eating and how much each person should get. Abby reported that other group members felt that she should get less food because she was not physically as strong and not as proficient in physical tasks such as portaging, therefore she was using up less energy than others on portages and did not require as many calories. Abby reported that not only did this further separate her from the rest of the group, but it also made her feel guilty for being female and not being as strong as the males. Abby reported that for the majority of the expedition, the issue of food stress was extremely detrimental to the way the group interacted. However, Abby also reported that the group connected over their food stress because food was so important to everyone. Abby noted that food actually became one of the first things they could all agree on and was an important bonding experience.

Abby also reported that for the majority of the expedition she was always very aware of being placed into the category of “Trip Mommy.” She described this role as picking up after everyone and being a sort of “caregiver.” She described how she was cautious of falling into this role since the first day of the program because she was the only female, and she had more experience on wilderness programs than most of her male counterparts. Early on, she reported this role was almost inevitable because it seemed to her that she was the only one willing to put forth extra effort to ensure things were done, like food packing. She noted that she was aware of the group seeing her in the “Trip Mommy” role early on and worked hard over the course of the program to break down the stereotypes that she was only good at cooking and dishes; she worked to excel in

other ways as well. Because of her dedication to work hard at both types of tasks, she began to feel overworked and underappreciated early in the program. According to Abby, even though she tried hard to keep up physically with the males, she still felt below the others because she just was not as strong and although she worked much harder at camp, she was still not appreciated.

Abby reported feeling both ostracized and unappreciated for over half of the program but reported that these feelings began to change due to two specific events. The first was being welcomed into the boys' tent. For most of the expedition, Abby slept in a tent by herself, which was lonely, and physically separating from the rest of the group. One night, the boys invited her to sleep in their tent with them, and she shared their tent for the rest of the expedition. Abby enjoyed not having to sleep alone, and reported that the invitation was an indicator that the other members of the group were accepting her as one of them, despite her difference of gender.

A second event that Abby noted as pivotal was a particularly beautiful day (day 18) that included several portages and long paddles. She reported that everyone in the group seemed to have a really happy day and were all really supportive of each other. After day 18 she noted that people started to support her on portages instead of being frustrated with her. She felt herself becoming more physically confident. Abby also reported that others were beginning to see her as useful in other ways. Abby described finding a place for herself that both she and the other members of the group felt comfortable with.

At the end of the program, Abby reported that she knew where she stood with the rest of the group, and she did not feel insecure about her difference anymore. She

described that she was respected for her unique skill set. The group's ability to see her in a new light contributed to a greater respect for them as well. Abby reported that their acknowledgment and respect of her was reciprocated.

Abby described how the physical setting of the trip was important to changes that she experienced, and the changes she noticed in the way the group interacted.

Specifically, Abby described how the beauty of the land around her kept her going through challenging times, and made her day to day problems seem less important.

Abby also reported that travelling down the river was very challenging and sometimes scary. The challenges that the river provided had two separate effects on the group. In the beginning, when the group was faced with challenges, the result was fighting, shirking responsibility, and feelings of defeat. Closer to the end of the program, it seemed that challenges brought out the best in the group, and that they helped them work together and lean on each other.

According to Abby, portages were also an important factor that contributed to shifts in group interactions throughout the trip. They represented a challenge, where despite the group's differences, the group needed to work together in some capacity to make it through. Furthermore, they were an indicator of group cohesion. When the group was having a good day and working together, the portages that day went smoothly and everyone finished feeling good. In the beginning portages were every person for themselves, with everyone carrying only their own stuff and not supporting other people. Over time, the group developed a system of teamwork. People started to take things that were not theirs to help other people out and make the overall portage go faster. Abby admitted that this group faced many challenges over the course of their wilderness

program, more than she had experienced on any other program. She described how they fought often, and how they would become annoyed with each other easily. However, she also described how the group became reliant on each other and how everyone learned that they had somewhere to fit in. Abby reported that the group even named everyone after Harry Potter characters. Abby wrote that on the last day of the expedition, “as a group, I feel we have come so far together.” She reported being very happy with the group, found herself content with where she stood with everyone, and reported the trip was ending on a really positive note.

Abby reported that overall, the group, including herself, changed very gradually. There were many problems in the beginning and many had to do with bad communication. It was really obvious that when they started communicating truthfully, things got better. She also described the program as an experience of getting out what you put in. She found the cost benefit analysis very clear and unobstructed when she was out on the expedition. She described needing to work together, otherwise everything was harder for her and for the whole group.

Abby reported that overall, she learned to work with all sorts of people. She found that “sometimes you come into situations with unlikely people and I’ve learned that it’s best to accept these people for who they are and work together in whatever situation you are in. Everything will be better.” Abby described the group as a crazy family, that drives her insane sometimes, but that she really loves.

### **Composite Depiction**

This second part of chapter four presents a collective, thematic portrayal of participant experiences, what is commonly referred to in heuristic inquiry research as the

composite depiction. Through a collective examination of the individual depictions and an analysis of that data, six main themes emerged: *experienced personal change and development*; *experienced conflict development and resolution*; *experienced relationship change and development*; *shift from “me” to “we” mentality*; *identification of specific factors of the program responsible for changes*; and *bringing learning back to everyday life*. Each of these themes is further divided into multiple sub-themes (see Table 1). The remainder of this chapter will describe each theme in turn, and outline the sub-themes of each. Many direct excerpts have been extracted from participant interviews and journal entries, including my own, to better elucidate the themes and retain participant voice. Throughout the composite depiction, my own voice has been intertwined with the other participants; as such I have not distinguished any excerpts as my own, and refer to myself as a participant throughout this section.

Table 1

*Overview of Themes and Sub-Themes*

Theme	Sub-themes
Experienced personal change and development	Developing technical skills Increase in confidence Change to self with sense of “new-self”
Experienced conflict development and resolution	Major perceived conflicts Dealing with conflicts Conflict as essential to relationship development
Experienced relationship change and development	Experiencing an initial dominance of differences Developing understanding and seeing the “real” version of others Acknowledgement and appreciation for unique skills and individuality Development of trust Seeing people in new ways
Shift from “me” to “we” mentality	Initial individualism and alienation Finding common ground with others Seeing group success as individual success Putting the needs of the group over their own

	needs
	Experiencing personal benefit from supporting others
	Experiencing the benefits of teamwork
Identification of specific factors on the program responsible for changes	Shared challenge
	Remote and beautiful setting
	Uniqueness of the experience and creating unique memories
	Time spent with others
Bringing learning back to everyday life	Approach old relationships differently
	Approach new relationships differently
	Maintaining the “new-self”

**Experienced personal change and development.** Throughout the course of the wilderness program, each participant reported on change(s) or development(s) within himself or herself. Participants’ experiences with personal change and development can be further divided into three sub-categories, developing technical skills, an increase in confidence and changes to self with a sense of *new-self*.

**Developing technical skills.** All participants reported an increase in their technical skills over the course of the program. At the beginning of the program, during training courses, participants described a noticeable increase in their whitewater rescue skills, and their wilderness first aid skills. This coincided with the whitewater rescue technician and wilderness first aid courses that all participants took part in. Even those participants that already had some previous training in similar courses reported that the training portion of the program, held at the research site, was a time when they noticed an increase in their technical skills. One participant, who had previously taken training courses in lifeguarding and first aid reported that he was learning “a whole bunch of skills...I have my NLS from before, but with the WFA there is a whole bunch of small differences in the skills...Talking about stabilizing and long term care.” Another



participant who also had lifeguard training and was a provincial level competitive swimmer described that he was increasing his skill level in whitewater rescue and swimming. He reported that he “learn[ed] how to do throw bagging, recoiling the rope, I got really good at it. Like throwing really fast and recoiling. And like jumping through holes and streams, just playing in whitewater.”

During the expedition, all participants reported on increased technical skills in a variety of areas including canoeing, packing up camp, making fires and cooking. However, the one area in particular that all participants described as having great improvement in was portaging. All participants described portages early in the program as long, slow, hard and poorly executed. However, over the course of the program, they found that their ability to complete a portage significantly improved. One participant reported:

At the beginning I remember our first portage was through this marsh, and such a mess. Just so gross. And no one really talked about portaging. There was not a lot of support. By the end of the trip, portaging was a well-oiled machine. But that first portage was like three or four trips, and people not bringing back barrel harnesses. Like no one was looking out for what other people needed. By the end you could tell we were supporting each other.

Another participant reported on an overall increase of technical skills, including paddling and portaging. She reported:

When I started this program, I literally had no paddling skills, plus I weighed about 90 pounds and had no idea how to carry a canoe. As the trip went on, I started to really get it. I felt like a lot of the skills came naturally to me, and people would actually ask to paddle with me because they thought I was pretty good. I remember at the beginning people would only paddle with me if it was going to be an easy day, because my canoe would always be at the end. I usually got stuck paddling with a leader. By the end I didn't care who I was paddling with because I felt like I could hold my own, and I wouldn't be at the very end all the time. I could carry boats and everything. It felt powerful. Such a good feeling.

***Increase of confidence.*** Four participants also reported an increased sense of self-confidence over the course of the program and described the different ways they experienced this. One participant reported that he gained confidence by feeling more sure about himself. This newfound confidence allowed him to take on more of a leadership role and help others. He reported:

The first couple days I think I was a follower, and I tried my best to be, because I was unsure. Then there's a point when you just feel better about yourself and more confident, and you can take some more of the lead. I felt like I was always smiling and helping. Opened my heart, and that really helped me and other people too.

An additional participant described gaining confidence in her skills and her place in the group, which helped create a sense of mutual respect among her peers. She reported:

I think I gained a lot of respect for guys. I think I did. Just because at the beginning I was the only girl and I am also a really good tripper. Like I can stand up and say, I know my shit, and the rest of them started to respect me for that.

This same participant also reported that during the expedition she realized that even though she was not as strong as many of the other participants, she was still useful to the group. She provided the metaphor "I am the screwdriver in a box full of hammers. Not used only for brute strength, but legitimately useful."

Another participant reported on a sense of increased confidence gained through realizing all that he had accomplished. He described how "there are a lot of things I look back on and say, wow I can't believe I did that," and that "if I can could do that, I can do anything."

***Change in self, sense of new-self.*** All participants reported on changes to themselves. Two participants referred to unidentifiable changes within themselves.

These participants reported on “feeling different” and that they “changed so much” but were unable to articulate these changes further.

Four participants were able to identify at least one way in which they experienced a change of self. One participant described the shift as reflecting a truer version of himself that was previously hidden, and that “at the end, I found myself.” He further reported:

At first, I was trying to impress people here, but I wasn’t being myself, I wasn’t allowing myself to expand. And from what I’ve learned here, I can learn to let loose and be myself from the start... I can learn to become the well rounded leader I’m supposed to be.

A separate participant mirrored this sentiment by reporting:

When I finished my program, I definitely felt differently, but I didn’t really think too much about it. It was really my parents who pointed it out in me. I remember my mom saying to me, sending you to that program was one of the best decisions we ever made. And it was true that it was pretty much their decision. I wasn’t totally against going, but I definitely wasn’t super excited about the idea either. But in the end, I am so glad I went because I do really feel that I came back more mature and just nicer. It’s hard to explain. It’s not like I was a different person, I think my personality didn’t change. It was kind of like the person inside of me that I always wanted to be was able to come out.

Another participant also reported that he “matured a lot” over the course of the program. This same participant also looked back to his behaviors at the beginning of the program and acknowledged the immaturity of it, and reported on being remorseful about many of his actions.

Two participants also disclosed that their perceptions of the world around them had shifted. One participant reported that “I’ve changed, and my perception of life has changed.” These new perceptions were also reported to surround newfound appreciations for everything they have. The same participant as above commented “I appreciate so much more because I can’t get it in the wilderness.” A separate participant reported that

“[I learned] to appreciate things, and look at things in a different way, and understand more what people are doing and meaning.”

Additionally, three participants reported on existing in a more open and positive state after their participation in the wilderness program. One participant reported on a specific time when he felt that he made the choice to be more positive. He reported:

At first it was hard...I wanted to be evacuated. I just didn't fit in and I didn't feel comfortable. I felt that maybe I was here for the wrong reasons. And then [the lead guide] said to give it one more shot...so I did just that. Things still got rough, like a lot of rocky roads we walked together but towards the end I just saw the better half.

Finally, three participants described a sense of a new-self. Participants' reports that “I've changed,” “I'm just different now,” or that they are “a new person” reflect that their sense of who they are has shifted.

**Conflict development and resolution.** At some point throughout the program, each participant described some conflict that existed within the group. Although the source, meaning and importance of these conflicts differed from person to person, each participant described being affected by conflicts within the group. Within this larger theme of conflict development and resolution, sub-themes include major perceived conflicts, dealing with conflicts and conflict as essential to relationship development.

***Major perceived conflicts.*** Throughout their wilderness program, all six participants outlined the conflicts that they themselves or the group were faced with. One prominent conflict on the WLP surrounded the food on the expedition. Four of the five participants on the WLP recorded that they felt they were not getting enough food on the expedition. As one participant reported, “we all get angry at food time because there is barely any food.” Four participants described that they were having “food stress” over

this issue. The following excerpt from one of the participant's journals outlines this preoccupation with food stress:

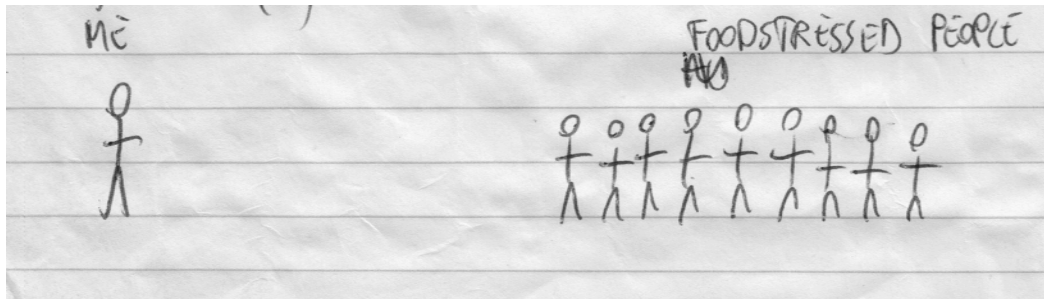
FOOD STRESS  
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This food stress also manifested into participants being concerned only for themselves and not thinking about others, as was reported by three participants. One participant reported that the other members of the group had:

No concerns except for themselves. I.e., my hypoglycemia, or the fact that they think it is fun to take 2<sup>nd</sup> portion of food away because I had a headache. Maybe they feel it's cool to put people down to feel better about themselves.

Further to this, a separate participant became very protective over his own food, remarking "I brought my own food, and if I brought my own food, I shouldn't have to share it, because I took the initiative to bring it one trip. Why should I share it?"

A lone participant on the WLP did not find that there was a food shortage and reported that the obsession with the lack of food was annoying and was causing the group to "get very snappy with each other. Many believe we didn't pack enough food and often there is major food stress over serving portions. Imaginary buffet and bitching about food have become common paddling partner talks." This participant provided the following drawing, depicting how the issue of food stress affected all of the others in the group, including the guides, and created a division between her and the rest of the group.



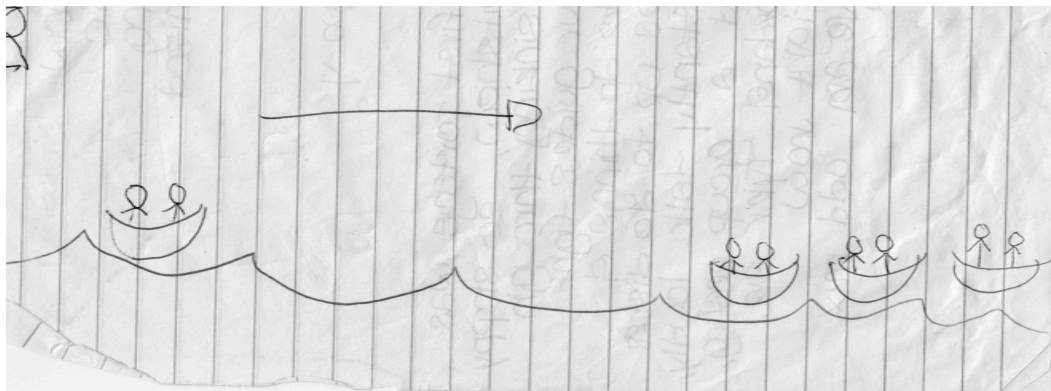
A second source of major conflict that was reported by four participants was the perceived unfair work sharing. One participant reported on this in the following journal entry. “Day 3 (really hard) In the group I am the soccer mom who picks up all of the boys shit and helps them pitch tents and pack drybags. Legit and often unappreciated.”

This same participant journalled on a separate day:

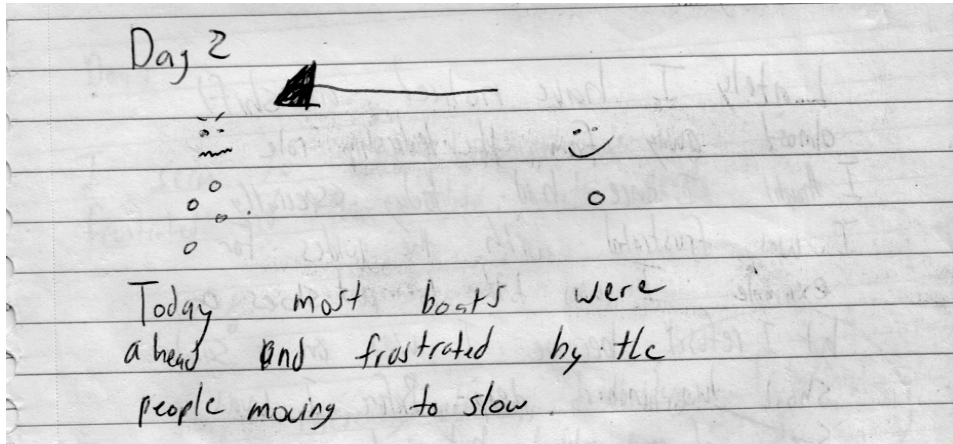
I am annoyed today because I feel the five guys see me as unuseful on portages since I struggle to take a boat up and down these crazy, rocky, steep, muddy, portages. I run this shitshow. I don’t know why they don’t appreciate that. I do 70% of the campsite work.

At several other times throughout the journals and interview this same participant reported feeling annoyed and angry that she was doing so much more work at camp than any other participant. Another participant reported feeling irritated that he seemed to always take the heavy items on the portage when others always took the lightest items.

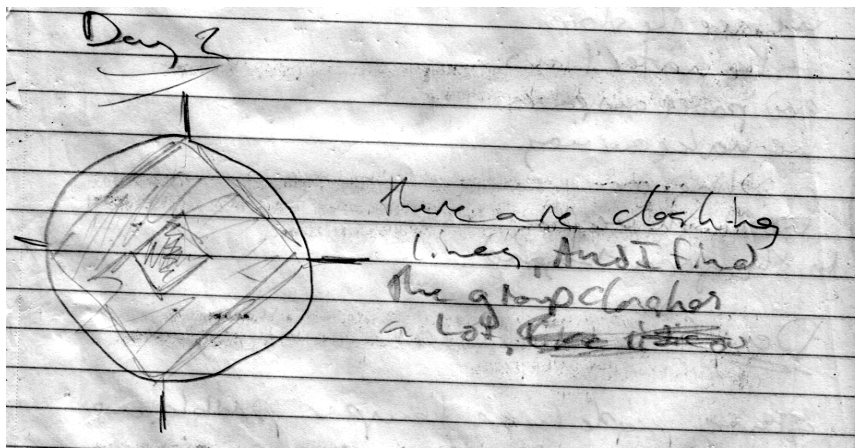
There was also the sentiment that because the group was not dividing the work fairly, that those participants that did not work as hard, on and off the river, were holding back the group. The following picture summarizes one participant’s position on this.



A second participant also drew a similar picture depicting that certain participants were causing frustration for the other participants who were working hard. This picture is below.



A third reported major conflict was the clashing of different personalities; this was reported by three participants. This is exemplified in the following picture one participant drew in his journal with the caption “there are clashing lines, and I find the group clashes a lot.”



Another participant felt that the personalities of two campers in particular were very different from the rest of the group and that these two personalities specifically created more tension in the group. This participant reported on one particular conflict in which:

Two campers dumped. The next day one of them was supposed to be leader. He and one of the guides got into a fight, and he refused to be leader. Then the same two campers insisted on paddling together... We weren't sure if we were going to do 5km or 20 km. After a floating lunch and a morning of being the last boat, the campers paddled speedily into the headwinds and passed the campsite and huge communications problems went down. So then we had to have a group meeting about their camper situation. Two guides kind of got into it after the group meeting.

This participant reported that this situation of two campers being the centre of arguments and conflict was a common occurrence.

***Conflict resolution.*** Despite the many conflicts that arose throughout the program, all participants also described conflicts that were resolved, and described the processes that were used to resolve these conflicts. At the beginning of the expedition, conflict resolution was portrayed negatively by three participants. One participant felt that instead of solving problems, that people tended to ignore them, and also ignored what he had to say. He contributed the following poem:

Words tossed in a salad  
please speak up you cowards  
no need to neglect  
constantly on repeat  
a broken record parrot

Another participant shared this view that in the beginning of the program, conflict resolution consisted mostly of accusing one or two people instead of working together to achieve a solution. A third participant also reported on having certain problems near the beginning of the program, but not bringing them up, because he felt that discussions about problems had become long and drawn out conversations with no real resolution. Three participants reported that as the program progressed, conflict resolution strategies became more effective. Two participants described a realization that talking through conflicts was important to their resolution. One participant that held this view reported:



One of the main things that everyone learned on trip was to express themselves, and talk to someone when you're mad, instead of letting it build up and holding a grudge against that person. Maybe not consciously, but when that person talks, you want to not even look at them. But if you talk to them and get it off your chest, it feels better and it helps the group more in general. Like [one participant] pissed me off a lot during the trip, but through the end of the trip, there was no real thing.

Another participant also reported on the importance of bringing up conflicts, as is outlined in the following passage:

I remember this one fight we had, it was so massive. It was around the middle of the program...maybe 10 days in or so, and a lot of people were kind of feeling like they wanted to go home, and everyone was talking about it a lot. And the leaders were getting angry, because we kept talking about home. So, we were on this portage and everyone took all the light stuff on the first trip, and all the boats were still at the beginning of the portage. And no one wanted to take boats because it was so buggy. So when we got to the end of the portage the first time, five of us went into the water to get away from the bugs, and everyone else went back. And the ones who went back carried so much stuff, like a boat and paddles. When they got back we were still in the water, and then everything was done. It all seemed fine, and then when we started paddling, someone made some comment about people being lazy. Anyways, it started this huge fight about how work division wasn't fair, and everyone trying to justify what their role was on the program. It was so bad that we had to stop in the middle of the river and float down for like 2 hours. And the leaders tried to get everyone to talk about it in an organized way. It kind of worked, but I remember it being more about everyone starting out as being so mad, and then it turned into everyone talking about how they were doing on the trip, and by the end everyone was crying, but not in an upset way, but not in a happy way either, more in a relieved way. I've never really experienced anything like it before.

In addition to discussing conflicts, another participant described how he realized that he needed to accept his own mistakes and reported, "I won't sit here playing the blame game, because then I'd have to eat the blame sandwich myself." Overall, participants reported on how they experienced their conflicts resolved and how conflict resolution evolved over the course of the wilderness program.

***Conflict as essential to relationship development.*** Although conflict was reported by five participants as being a stressful and negative thing, three participants

also found that the process of having conflict and resolving this conflict was important to the development of relationships within the group. One participant reported, “if there was an argument, we would divide as a group and we could all voice our opinions and there would be other people on your side...It helped us that we talked a lot.” Another participant described that:

[Talking through conflict] brought me a lot closer to them... I think that I am closer with a lot of these people than I am with my friends. For the most part, I've said stuff and talked about stuff with a lot of these people more than I have with my friends.

One participant also described how in the wake of conflicts and their resolution, people were more real and open with one another. She reported how group members were more sensitive to each other after the resolution of a conflict:

After that massive fight, everyone was kind of different to each other, maybe more sensitive. For me, I guess I saw such a vulnerable side of people. It's not to say we didn't fight again so many times, because we did. But none were really as personal or as intense. I think that I was more sensitive to people because they were honest and told everyone what pissed them off, and what upset them. And I think it felt so good too, to get everything out, like no more secrets.

Participants outlined that in a variety of ways, being able to work through the conflicts that arose was helpful to the group and was important to the overall development of the group. Regardless of the specific conflict or path to resolution, it is clear that participants identified the experience of conflict and conflict resolution as an important aspect that impacted the way they viewed others, themselves in relation to others, and impacted the development of relationships as well.

**Relationship change and development.** All participants in this present study also reported that the relationships they had with other members of the group changed and developed over the course of the program. In general, all participants described

different stages or developments in their relationships with other group members. These included: experiencing an initial dominance of differences; developing understanding and seeing the “real” version of others; acknowledgement and appreciation for unique skills and individuality; development of trust; and seeing people in new ways.

*Initial dominance of differences.* All participants described their initial view of their fellow group members as being very different from one another. One participant reported, “these people, like everyone is really, really different, and their reactions are just so hard to judge.” Furthermore, these differences were based on what people appeared to be on a surface level, as is evidenced by the following interview excerpt:

At the beginning of the program, when I met my group, I remember thinking, oh great, they put me in the loser group, and I was so pissed. No one had that personality spark, or seemed to be fun or exciting. It was so unfair. Even the way people looked. So many girls from other groups were these gorgeous, charismatic people, and everyone in my group was plain and boring.

Another participant reported on a similar surface view of the members of his group finding:

From the beginning... we were all going to do different things, like Marc was going off to become an engineer, and I have no education, Jason is so young, and Abby is the only girl. Everyone was like in their own box for what they were from the outside.

One specific difference that the above participant mentioned, that was reported by all of the other participants as well (excluding myself), was the difference in gender between the five males on the WLP and the one female. The female participant herself reported how although this was never openly discussed as a group, that it was an issue that created distance between her and her group. She reported:

I think I actually need to have a discussion with them about how I am the only girl, like we’ve never actually acknowledged it as a group...it’s something that we obviously realize, but it’s not talked about. Like when we were doing Leave No

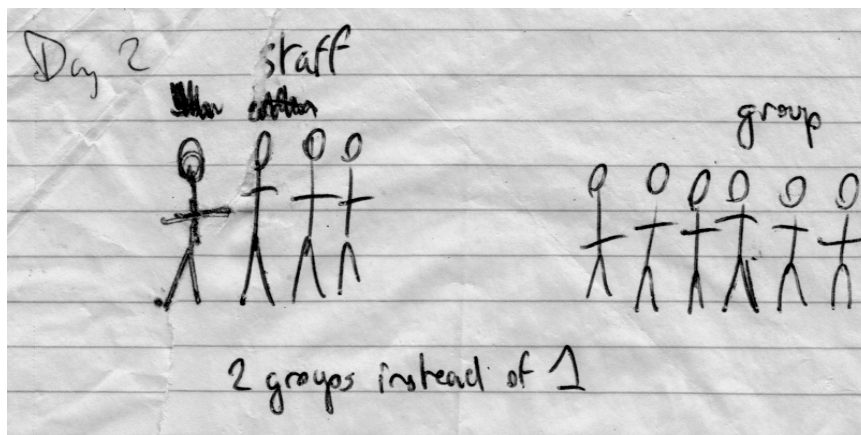
Trace, I was like, well where do I put my tampon? And instead of being immature about it, they just pretended not to hear. Ignored it.

She further reported on this same issue:

I have started to get mad at people already. Like they are teasing me a lot right now and sometimes I feel like I am like QUIT IT!... We are definitely not all together, I can see cliques within the group starting to form. Like people's interests group them together, like the first aid stuff some people are into, but I'm not into that much. We are really just establishing everything... Right now Trevor is into his girlfriend at home, which can make him more comfortable with me. Whereas some guys are still freaked out by me.

Three other participants noted divisions among the group along other lines including smokers vs. non-smokers, smart people vs. not-smart people, and campers vs. guides.

One participant provided the following drawing outlining his feelings on the division between campers and guides.



*Developing understanding and seeing the “real” version of others.* Four participants described the experience of coming to better understand the members of their group, and/or reported that they were able to uncover the “real” version of people throughout the program. One participant described this process in the following excerpt:

The first day I met James and Marc I thought they were [guides]. So I think I was initially a bit intimidated. But then I go to know them on my level the first three days. James didn't really talk so no one knew him at all, but then after that we really got to know him. By the end he was this character who was just really happy...every view I had of each person transformed at least three or four times

on that trip. Just by talking to them, getting to know them, paddling with them on different days, understanding all of their moods.

Another participant provided the following poem:

Oh there are mountains  
And water moving fast through fountains  
What a beautiful place  
For us all to learn about  
Each other's true face

This poem clearly outlines that while on the wilderness program, participants are learning about each others' true "faces" or selves. Furthermore, the female participant discussed the shift she noticed from the beginning to the end of the program about being the only female, and connected this to learning about and understanding the other participants:

At the beginning I wasn't really comfortable being the only girl. A lot of the guys were hard to get to know at first, and it was hard to crack through that shell. Almost scary at first. Now it shows how far we've come. I know certain behaviours are just how they are. And in the beginning, I was really insecure about where I stood, and as a member of the group, and didn't know where I would fit in. But now, knowing who my friends are and knowing how they everyone and how they react to me and to things. And just knowing where I stand in their eyes... I slept in a tent with... Marc and Trevor a lot, which is not usually allowed. But just being welcomed into their tent, was so huge. And our conversations were so important to me.

This report is very different from her first report on her feelings of being the only female. In this she discussed her transition from feeling very different and alone, to being welcomed by the other members of her group, and feeling confident that she knew them all, and that they knew her as well. On a separate issue, one participant described how he became much better at understanding the moods of one of his fellow participants, and understood what was really going on when he appeared to be in a bad mood. He reported that:

I spent a lot of time with James, and I know when he gets pissed of, one of the main reasons is because his blood sugar gets low. So when I'm hanging with him

and get gets pissed off, just like randomly, I know to calm down and not overreact to this, his blood sugar is getting the best of him.

Just as participants increased their understanding of the other participants and reported seeing the “real” versions of their group members, two participants also described that they themselves were becoming more “real” versions of themselves. One participant reported that “I found at first I was like, who are these people, why are they still so foreign to me, why don’t I understand them, or be the WLP that they are being?...Then I just stopped trying to be that [person] and started being myself.” This same participant also described, “my true colours didn’t really come out till the end... And if [no one] took off their masks then you would never really get a full understanding of who people are. Especially on a long trip, it’s like you started one way and then you just change.”

***Acknowledgment and appreciation of difference.*** Five participants also reported on the ways that they began to respect the unique skills of the other participants and respect their individuality. One participant outlined this simply by reporting, “some people are better at accomplishing things.... I found some people were good at portaging and some weren’t, and those people might be better at cooking, or maybe better at canoeing. It’s a give-[take] situation.”

Another participant found that he enjoyed the stories and personal experiences that others shared with him. He reported, “each day, when I paddled with someone, it was like reading a new book. And when you are paddling with them, you get to read their life book, and you get to experience what they’ve experienced.”

Three separate participants reported on their appreciation for what each person in the group helped them with, or contributed to their development. One of these participants found that “everyone had their role. Not just in like doing work, but in like

the person who is really stable, the person who stays up and wants to play cards every night. There's different people you go to for different things." An additional participant reported:

For the most part, everyone just got along and developed their own role in the group. And over time these roles stood out more and more. People started to appreciate people's unique role more over time. Then people would say it. I can honestly say that I would rather have these people than anyone else on the trip. Here's why. I find it was a great group set-up, and if any of those people wasn't there, I wouldn't be the same person I am now. I've learned life lessons from all of them. I just appreciate them so much.

As the above excerpt outlines, this participant reported that each person contributed something to the group, and this individual's development; this was both acknowledged and appreciated. One participant adds that "[I appreciate them] for sharing stories, the way they dealt with everything, what they've gone through, how easy going, how athletic. Just all their strength. I appreciate them for sharing." These sentiments are mirrored in the metaphor created by a separate participant who wrote "I am like a tree in the forest. Everything contributes to the growth of a tree and I feel like everyone is contributing to my growth."

Thus, in a variety of ways, five participants reported that each person in the group had a special role, and contributed important things to the group. Additionally, three participants also reported on their feelings of appreciation for the unique skills, experiences and characteristics of each group member.

***Development of trust.*** A third aspect of relationship change and development that was reported on by three participants was the experience of developing trust in their fellow participants. One participant described:

I [didn't] trust people at all, and it took me a long time to trust them. When I did my lesson, I did a trust sequence game and after I really [trusted] these people. Its

something to be paddling with someone and trust them to make a cross-bow draw when you need to, [or] trusting that the person behind you will catch you when you fall is very.... It's just hard to place your trust when you don't know people.

A second participant described how she developed trust in others over the course of the program, and how this led to an increase in confidence. She reported:

I think that as the program went on, I started to feel that people had my back. Like carrying a canoe for example, I was actually so afraid to carry a canoe at the beginning of the program, but by the end, I wouldn't think twice about it, as long as someone was with me. I mean I did get a bit stronger, but more than that, I felt comfortable saying to whoever, get this boat off me now! And really after a little break, I could go for a while again. I never really learned to prop the canoe up off a rock or a tree, but everyone knew that I was so little, and would always run over to help me if I looked like I was about to collapse.

According to a third participant, developing trust was essential to developing relationships with those around him. He reported that without trust, no real friendships would have formed.

*Seeing people in new ways.* According to their reports, three participants also experienced a shift in the way they were seeing those around them. One participant found that he saw people in a more positive way by the end of the wilderness program, and reported that "they were worthy of my time and I was worthy of their time." He continued this thought in the following excerpt from his second interview:

I wish I would have gone in from the beginning more open minded. But a lot of good things happened to me, and there was a lot of really good and genuine people here and I wish it hadn't taken me so long to realize that. There are good people everywhere if you just take the time to look. Before I wasn't looking, but now I can see everything. Before I was looking down, but now I look across and I can see a more real version of everything.

Another participant described her experience of a shift from seeing everyone as very different, to seeing them as friends, and even family. She reported:

It's crazy to think that we are leaving the Moisie tomorrow morning. As a group, we have come so far together. All of us have come from such a variety of



backgrounds and decided to come on the WLP for a variety of reasons. It made it hard to work together at first, but now we've formed a little trip family. It's sad to realize that we're ending our routine and splitting off to go do our solos. I'm grateful I had the opportunity to become close to so many individuals I wouldn't have normally.

When I think about us as a group, I think about our own little family. Like we've just been with each other so long... As a group it was crazy, because we all came to the to this program for so many different reasons... Jason came because he had to, James came to get off certain medications. We just all came for so many different reasons, and we came from so many different walks of life. It was hard for us at first to work together and to get along, and not to constantly bash heads. And it was hard for our guides too; they were all so different and had different training... The head guide isn't from the company and his way of doing thing compared to [the assistant guide], and so it was all just really hard to get along. But we've developed our way of having our own little family, and by the end of the trip we knew what was what and we all had our routines, and we had formed into this, family.

In addition to viewing the individuals in the group in new ways, and seeing them as a family, four participants also reported that their views of the group itself had shifted.

Three participants described the group as “united” or a “unit” at the end of the program.

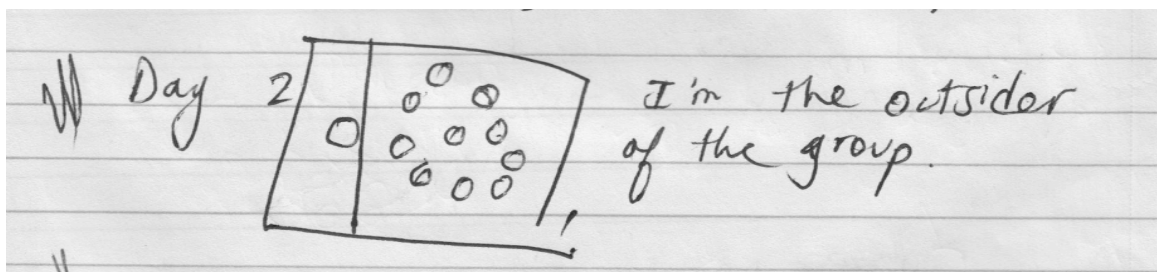
One participant provided the following drawing during the third week of the expedition, depicting his feelings of group togetherness.



**Shift from “me” mentality to “we” mentality.** There were numerous reports from all participants on the experiences of becoming a functioning part of a cohesive

group. I have labeled this transition from thinking as an individual to thinking as part of a group a shift from a “me” mentality to a “we” mentality. Within this theme, all participants reported on their experiences of the initial individualism and alienation, finding common ground with others, seeing group success as individual success, putting the needs of the group over their own needs, experiencing personal benefit from supporting others and/or experiencing the benefits of teamwork.

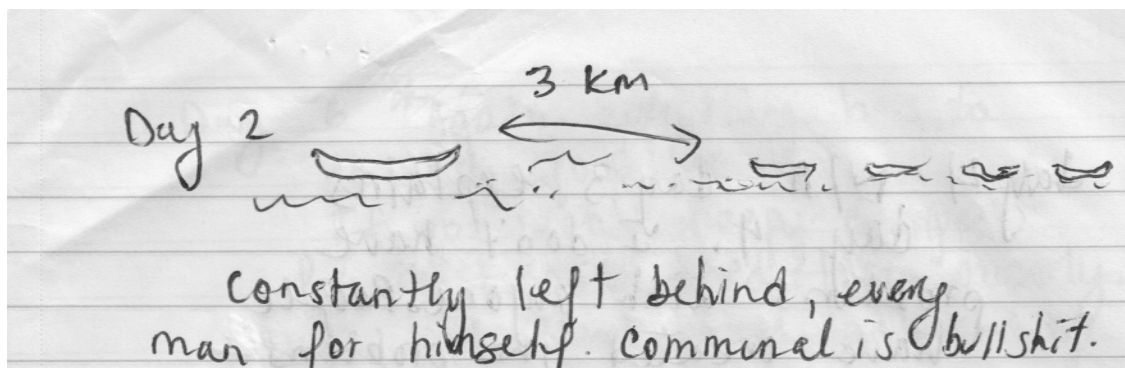
***Initial individualism and alienation.*** During their interviews, all participants reported that the people that made up their wilderness program group were very different from each other and three reported increased concern that they would be set apart from the group based on their specific differences. During the expedition, these three participants in particular reported on their experiences of continued alienation from the group. One participant wrote, “I am the rotten apple of the group...people don’t like what they don’t understand. I find I don’t fit in the play pen.” This participant described his feelings of not fitting in with the other participants, and standing out as someone that is not as good as the others. He also provided the following drawing in his journal, visually depicting similar feelings.



Another participant also referred to himself as the “runt” of the group, and described his feelings of having to “keep proving” himself to the rest of the group.

Separately, the female participant on the WLP wrote in her journal “I feel that is it apparent that I’m the only girl in this group. Through my sleep situation I am alienated.” Days later, she wrote again on this topic, “I see two similar things – one of the guys being a problem camper for the group, and me being alienated as the only girl. Both are very apparent and true.” She described the continued feeling of isolation and alienation of being the only female camper on her program. In the second passage she also described another male camper who stands apart from the group, and is also alienated.

In addition to these reports of alienation, were reports on the group’s perceived individualism with both themselves and others near the beginning of the program. Three participants reported that in a variety of activities, including portaging, setting up camp, doing dishes and paddling that they can recall doing as little work as possible themselves, and also noticed others doing as little work as possible. Two participants specifically reported on people taking the lightest possible items on portages and walking very slowly so that they would not have to go back for a second trip along the trail. Two participants also reported that others were individualized in the way that they interacted with those around them. One participant provided a drawing depicting how he felt left behind while paddling and that the stronger paddlers of the group went ahead to get to the campsite first and were annoyed with him and ignored him instead of staying back to help him.



Another participant described the lack of concern that others showed for people's opinions. He wrote in his journal:

I think people can't embrace anything around them because they are too focused on themselves. I follow some conversations within the group about certain topics and many of them are very opinionated to the point that moderacy means nothing. They disagree rather than agree; fight rather than solve. So hard to understand. I sit there boggled. FOOD is a big problem, people [cheating] each other on portions, sometimes eating quicker or slower, apparently takes away from the group. Sick of arguments, being bossed around...Kinda just wanna go home.

Also in this report, here again, the issue of food comes up. In four participants' reports, the "me" mentality remains for most of the program over the issue of food, even when a "we" mentality is reported in most other aspects.

***Finding common ground.*** According to three participants' reports, finding common ground, or similarities, with other participants affected the way that they viewed and interacted with the other participants in the group. These participants reported that finding common ground was an important first step in changing the way they viewed and interacted with others. As all of the participants had reported on how different everyone was at the beginning of the program, three participants reported that in order to develop relationships with other participants, they needed to start by finding something that they both had in common to discuss. One participant described:

[with] Jason, we talked about Montreal, and what we did back there, and that created a common ground. Other than that we didn't have much in common, but that's what we found to talk about. With Abby, we would talk about her guy problems, or with Marc I would talk about whatever. Like different people always had different things to learn about them and they were always coming out at different times on the trip, when they thought they could trust me, or they became more comfortable with me.

Similar to this report, another participant found that finding common ground with another participant helped turn a stranger into a friend. This participant reported:

With Alex, we could talk forever about what it was like to live in a small town. He was this big quiet guy, and no one really knew him, maybe we were almost scared of him. But figuring out about our towns, and actually knowing similar people, and he played hockey and I played ringette, so we had been to loads of the same arenas, it was cool. By the end, I actually always wanted to paddle with him; conversation just became so natural.

***Putting the needs of others and group needs over individual needs.*** Four

participants reported on their own propensity to put the needs of others in the group over their own. According to these reports, this was true for both physical actions and in verbal interactions. One participant recalls a specific event in which he put the safety of another group member over his own wellbeing. He recalled:

I remember Abby, the boat started going and she was in this eddy, not tied to anything. And she started floating out and I was the only one there. She was like, James! And I jumped off this rock it was more than ten feet tall and totally busted my leg, just like a vegetable. But I managed to grab the boat. I was messed up, but I was like, are you ok? She was fine, but I just cared about her. It was weird.

Two participants also reported on shifting their actions and interaction with others in order to support other participants in a way that worked for them. This is clear from one participant's report who described "I had my own way of delegating, and I started off by saying "get the fuck up." And no one responded well to that. Then when people did it to me, I realized that you need to treat people the way you want to be treated." This participant described the process of realizing that although he enjoyed telling people to get up in a certain way, that they did not enjoy that process, and as such, he shifted his way of interacting with others in this situation to put other's preferences over his own.

In addition to participants' reports that they were putting the needs of others over their own, one participant described that others were doing this as well. She reported on a specific day where the others in her group put down their own gear to help her up a portage trail. She elaborated, "we did a 125m portage, easy but with a challenging sandy,

wet hill. I felt very supported by the whole team when I struggled to take a boat up this sandy steep hill.”

*Experiencing personal benefit from supporting others.* In placing the needs of others over their own and working to achieve common goals as a group, five participants reported that they experienced some sort of personal benefit from supporting and being kind to others. One specific aspect of this that four participants reported on was that it was mentally beneficial for them to get along with everyone, even if this felt like a challenge. One participant reported, “you need to get along with everyone and try to develop these bonds because it’s going to be a lot harder for you to spend a month an a half with people you hate.” Similarly, another participant described how:

Usually if I don’t like someone I will just walk away and not have them in my life at all. But with these people, if I had an argument with them, we would just wake up the next morning, and they might be leader of the day, and they might be in charge, so it’s really in my own best interest to work out problems and be friends with everyone.

Although these participants do not describe personal gain from physically supporting another, they both provide an account of working to develop and mend relationships with others, which can be viewed as mental or emotional support. Another mental benefit derived from helping others outlined by two participants, was the positive feelings and satisfaction that one got from helping another. One participant reported:

It made me feel good to be the one that people came to. Like I was powerful. Especially since I knew absolutely nothing in the beginning. When people started coming to me and asking me to help them set up a bear hang, it was such a good feeling. I guess it’s like when people volunteer at an orphanage, they feel good about helping other people out, like your own existence means something to other people, and it was the same type of feeling.

Similarly, another participant described how “[helping others] helps me too. In fact, I think mostly it really helped me to awaken to the group. Like it helped me get through and feel valued.”

The sense that there can be physical gain from supporting others was also reported by one participant. He described his own realization that the whole group, including himself would ultimately be more successful in physical activities if he worked toward group successes, and supported those around him, instead of focusing only on his own personal success. He recalled:

At the beginning you are kind of thinking, like, ok, I want to do MY best. But then, at the end, it’s like if we work together we’ll be more successful than if we worked on our own individual success, like it’s only focusing on a single part.

Regardless of whether the benefit was mental, physical or emotional, five participants reported on getting something positive from supporting others in their group.

***Experiencing benefits/necessity of teamwork.*** Participants all reported on times when they worked well together and times when they did not work well together. A common theme through all of these reports was that when the group worked well as a team, and supported each other, their task seemed easier. One participant summarized this sentiment in his report, “everyone realized how everything worked, and that it’s so much easier for everyone when we just work together. Everything goes by faster. Like there were push days that still worked because we worked together.” According to the reports of five participants, this realization was noticed while the group was portaging. One participant recalled:

At the Salmon Ladder portage, it was so hard. It was up this steep, steep terrain that was like sand, but vertical... And James was always concerned with how bad it was, and he didn’t want to walk it, and I thought good thing, because I can barely finish empty handed. But seeing James go up it with a pack, I was like,

wow, I didn't think you had it in you. And seeing Trevor at the bottom delegating and seeing [our guide] bring a canoe up, and seeing Abby with double packs, I was like, wow, look how far we've come. This is such an event. And being rewarded at the end of the trip with the satisfaction of knowing how well we did was just cool.

There also were reports from all participants that the group's ability to complete portages was much ameliorated towards the end of the trip. While two participants described their own increased strength and technical skill as reasoning for this, four participants also described how the group's ability to work as a team and support each other was also responsible. One participant described the group's portages near the beginning of the trip a "shitshow" and refers to those towards the end of the trip "a well oiled machine." This participant further elaborated:

Of course you can only take things from your own boat, but that doesn't mean that the whole portage will be fast if just you are efficient. We need to help each other and if you don't have any frew in your boat, you could grab some from somebody else, like [our guides] always had loads of frew. So maybe like, help [them] out, grab other people's stuff. Just that mindset, like looking out for each other and helping each other in the portaging began to develop and show. It really showed our progress.

Another participant reported that the group worked together in a way that each person could take charge in those areas that he/she was strongest, and others would help take charge in those areas that he/she was the weakest. Working together like this was more efficient. She reported:

We all definitely gained a lot of respect for each other, and all of the skill sets that each of us have, it all just worked well together. Like for an example, I'm not a very strong portager, and I struggled to take boats, and those portages were crazy. Like walking on rocks straight up a hill and then going through mud. It was just not the easiest thing. But compared to Jason, he's a really good portager, but not a great paddler. But I can paddle. Just all of our skill sets came out and they're different, so we learned to help and teach each other.



Participants also reported on a sense that they needed to work together and rely on others in order to be successful on the expedition. This reliance was reported in physical activities such as paddling a canoe and portaging, but also in mental capacities such as supporting and respecting each other.

One participant reported that learning to work together and respecting each other was a necessary part of making it down the river to complete the expedition:

I think it's just an experience that you really get what you give. Like if you want a fire, you need to go out in the rain and get firewood. I think that's so apparent out there. It's just such a big lesson I've learned from this company. Like we've got to get down this river together. So we've got to learn to work together and respect each other. To make this work we need to respect each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Another participant recalled one specific event that made him realize not only that he needed to physically rely on others, but also described how someone stopping to help him changed his outlook on the expedition in a positive way. He reported:

I started portaging, everyone was mad at me. There was so much mud, and I wasn't dirty yet, and I remember Julia saying I think the group would like it if you helped. I was like so pissed. I was like screw you! But I went, and as soon as I stepped out I sank to my knees in mud, so I walked a bit further. I remember no one would carry my pack because it was one of the heavier ones, so I took it, and then I saw up to my waist in mud. And then Marc came back and he was like, oh shit, you're stuck! And he helped me. I was like, why would he help me? He got muddy to help me, and it just changed my whole outlook instantly. That one thing. Powerful.

**Identification of factors responsible for changes.** As previously outlined, all participants reported on a variety of personal changes, as well as shifts in the way they viewed those around them, and/or changes to the group. All participants reported on a variety of factors that they believed lead to these shifts. These included shared challenge, remote and beautiful setting, uniqueness of the experience and creating unique memories, and/or time spent with others.

***Shared challenge.*** Shared challenge was reported as one factor responsible for participants' perceived changes. Two participants found that this shared sense of challenge was the most important factor that contributed to the way they viewed their fellow participants. One participant reported:

I think that always going through hard stuff with people, like dumping [in a rapid] or an extremely hard portage with someone or sleeping in a tent. Those are the experiences that makes people bond. Like after a day of hard paddling with someone, you feel this sense of camaraderie. That really sticks. After that, when you paddle together again, you feel like you already know them, and then you go through more hard stuff...there was this one day I was in a canoe with Marc, and then we just started talking about everything. I don't even remember the exact conversation, but I just remember there were no barriers, no walls anymore. That was like day 15, in the middle.

Another participant reported, "the challenges bring you together." She elaborated on this in her report:

Today, we're having a duff day inside a beautiful cabin. The group is loving it. We woke up and taught our lesson plans and are enjoying large amounts of tea and coffee. It feels good to work as a group and everyone's spirits are high. Lessons included; beading, trust games, French, edible plants, beatboxing and meditation. So far this hasn't been a push trip at all. We do 20 km days and have had five duff days in 18 days (lazy trip). But what I've observed is the group comes together a lot more when we do push (like end of the day portaging), rather than our down time when we do snap and bicker. I'm looking forward to nine days of straight paddling without duff days.

While relaxing days are a pleasant experience, both participants described how the challenging moments of the trip helped the group to develop in positive ways and were important to shifting the way they viewed others.

***Remote and beautiful setting.*** All of the participants described that the remoteness and/or beauty of their surroundings during the expedition were important factors leading to their perceived changes in themselves and the group. One participant described that the remote setting of the expedition was able to provide a setting where

personal changes can happen because there is a sense of freedom from rules and guidelines. He elaborated:

In the wilderness, that's where I feel the most free. Free from anybody telling me what to do, because I don't really deal well with people telling me, these are the boundaries, and these are your lines... and I think these trips also help us realize our own boundaries. Like a guide isn't going to tell you, you have to do this rapid, you evaluate it yourself and say, do I think this rapid would be safe for me.

Another participant described how being in the remote wilderness removed the distractions that are in everyday life. By removing these distractions, people are able to spend time really getting to know each other in a positive way. He reported, "once everyone goes to bed and there's a fire, people express themselves more often. And it's just a better vibe that people get, it's like paddling too, there is really nothing better to do, so you just talk."

The beauty of the setting was also described by three participants as an important factor leading to shifts in the way the group interacted through a sense of wonder and awe that it inspired in the participants. One participant described this as:

So relaxing and breathtaking. I remember when we first started paddling into the mountains, I think I was paddling with James, and we were both just in awe. Like we just came off a hard portage, and everyone was kind of upset and cranky and then we just came into this gorgeous mountain and we were all astounded.

In the above report, this participant also described how the beauty and majesty of the setting helped participants forget about their problems and quarrels, replacing them instead with a meaningful experience shared by two people. Two other participants also shared this view, describing how being in such a beautiful, untouched place with someone else created a special kind of bond.

*Uniqueness of the experience, creating unique memories.* Sharing a unique experience and/or creating unique memories with others was reported by five participants

as factors that contributed to the development of relationships among participants. One participant reported:

You feel a certain closeness to these people from all being under the same circumstances that you are under, and it's such a certain dependable bond... Like living in a tent and waking up with wet clothes and going poo in the woods. All of it. A different life.

Another participant provided a similar report, and elaborated:

When I got back home, I longed for the people from my program so much. I missed them in such a different way then I missed my friends and family when I was on the program. The program was such a big part of my life at that time, and everything I was feeling and thinking related back to experiences from the program. I would try and explain stories and jokes to my friends and my parents, but they just didn't get it. It was hard because no one else in the world would ever really understand what that program meant, and why it was so good. It's not something you can explain to people. For a long time, I almost felt like part of me was missing.

Both participants reported that the bonds or relationships that were created during a wilderness program form in a special and strong way because of the unique experience shared by that group. As the second participant described, the relationships created during the program were different from those relationships that are formed in everyday life because the experience was so unique.

Three participants also reported that while on their expedition, they created memories that were unique to that experience and that group of people. These participants reported that they created songs and/or jokes that were meaningful only to those people who shared the experience. One participant provided the following song that was written by the group while on their expedition:

No one told me life was gonna be this way  
We shared some jokes  
No cokes  
We paddled our days away  
It's like we're always picking up our gear

When a killer duck decides to bite Luke's toe  
And now we're in fear

And I'll be there for you  
When our canoe tips over  
I'll be there for you  
When you get a Quasi eye  
I'll be there for you  
Cause you're in my canoe

So no one told me that the food could taste this way  
Fire smoke  
We choke  
What a way to start the day  
It's like we're always wishing for a mirror  
By the end of these three weeks we'll look like we haven't showered in years

And I'll be there for you  
When our canoe tips over  
I'll be there for you  
When you get a Quasi eye  
I'll be there for you  
Cause you're in my canoe.

Two participants reported that the creation of shared humour on the expedition was an important factor to the way that the group bonded. One participant elaborated:

Obviously living shared experiences brings a group together, but I also think shared humour is one of the biggest things that people can share together. Everyone is having a good time. I think everyone has their own sense of humour and once people have a group sense of humour, that's when you know a group is bonding and getting inside each other's heads. Because knowing what someone else thinks is funny isn't always easy. And when you just meet someone, you have no idea what they think is funny or dumb, and what their opinions are. So you can't feel comfortable making jokes, because you have no idea what might be offensive. You don't know their religion. So by the end, the more outrageous the jokes are, the more you are getting to know people, because you feel safe... the things I remember are all the jokes and all the times we messed around. We were always [joking] with each other, like shut up, you suck. We knew we could take it... It just changed a lot as we got to know each other better.

***Time spent with others.*** Four participants reported that the time they spent with the others in their group was also an important factor that affected personal and group

changes for them; changes that were connected specifically to the development of relationships. One participant reported that for him, it was specifically the time spent in physical proximity to one another. He described this in the following excerpt:

I think that physical proximity speeds [relationship development] up. And I think that physical proximity makes tensions build, but obviously every relationship goes through ups and downs. And usually in an urban environment you are seeing somebody two or three times a week, you are going to go through these ups and downs, but over a longer period of time because you are only seeing them two or three times a week, so the process takes longer. But even in the last couple days I have spent over a months time with these people. So the ups and downs happen a lot faster.

A separate participant reported that the extended amount of time spent together had an impact on relationship development. This participant reported:

I think the length of the program is important to how relationships develop. I've been on loads of shorter programs, like around a week long, and it's so different. You can see relationships starting to transform and develop, but then it's over, right when you get to the important part. I don't know if you could put a time line on exactly how long programs need to be, I think it's different for each group, but I think for my wilderness leadership program, we didn't start really knowing each other until almost two weeks in. Probably after we had that really big fight. And even then, everything kept changing right up until the end. It's not like we hated each other and then fought, and then loved each other. Everything was always shifting, dynamic.

This participant described how on shorter programs the beginnings of relationship development are apparent, but before any meaningful transitions can occur, the program has ended. Thus, according to all participants, a variety of factors of the wilderness program were responsible for the shifts that were described in the way participants viewed themselves, others and the group in general.

**Bringing learning back to life.** One final theme that was present in five participant reports was the desire to bring their learning back to their everyday lives. One participant reported, "I want to take what I've learned from this experience and not only

apply it to everyday life, but to other programs, to work, to relationships, to family, to life.” Specifically, these five participants reported that they wanted to approach both old and new relationships differently, and/or maintain their sense of “new self” that was previously described.

***Approach old relationships differently.*** Three participants reported that they saw their pre-existing relationships with others in their everyday lives in a new way. These participants described newfound appreciations for their friends and family and/or reported on desires to create more open, honest and respectful relationships with these people. One participant in particular discussed specifically his relationship with his father, and reported on his newfound understanding of the negative relationship that previously existed between them, and his desire to ameliorate the relationship. He reported:

I want to spend more time with [my Dad]. The past couple months has just been really stressful for him dealing with me. I am kinda more of a burden than anything. Like all the court and everything else I’ve done. When I get back I am going to try and spend as much time with him as possible. No one lives forever, so I want to make memories with him. And just mature more, so I can take advantage of these moments and not fuck them up. Just realize how precious it is.

***Approach new relationships differently.*** In addition to approaching pre-existing relationships in a more positive way, three participants described how participating the wilderness program would help them to approach future relationships in a new way. Specifically, these participants reported that the experience taught them to see the good in people and not judge people too quickly. One participant reported:

I look at meeting people in different ways now. I think I can go up and meet someone totally new and different and be ok with that. Like just to know that I don’t have to be nervous or intimidated. And it also taught me that sometimes you get thrown into a situation and no matter what people are there you need to make friends with them. No matter who you are meeting you can find something

good in them. Because this summer, I shared my time with five people that normally I would not have been friends with. But after meeting them, and being with them for over a month, I love those guys as much as I love my friends I've had for years... [I]t teaches me that I shouldn't underestimate who you can or should be friends with, because everyone has something good to offer, and you just need to find that.

Similarly, another participant reported:

I think these people on this trip weren't people that I see myself being close with off trip. But now I've become close with them, and I spent a lot of time on trip thinking about how this wasn't at all what I expected my WLP to be. I came on this trip and it wasn't how I pictured it. I think I spent a lot of time letting go of that perfect WLP picture, and just realizing that this is my WLP and I am still learning a lot from these people, even if they are not the kind of people I was originally expecting. Like in this leadership program we needed to learn how to work with all those personalities... I think I'll definitely approach people differently. I think I learned from this.

Both of these participants describe how they formed relationships with a group of people that they typically would not have chosen to spend time with. They also reported on shedding preconceived notions about the type of people they could work with and the specific experience they thought they should be having. By dropping these preconceptions, they were both able to experience the positive things that each individual in their group offered, and described a desire to bring this learning back to their everyday lives.

A separate participant also described that wilderness program participation would help her be more open and accepting when meeting new people. She reported:

I think that I'll give people more of a chance right off. It made me realize that so many people are better than you give them credit for right off. And there's not a specific type of people that are the best kind to have as friends. I guess I have a bit more of an open mind about meeting people.

***Maintaining the new-self.*** As previously mentioned, all participants described a shift in their personal character, and/or a sense that they were existing in a more open and



positive state, with three participants reporting on a sense of “new-self.” Two participants reported on a desire and determination to maintain this “new-self” upon their return home. One participant reported:

I will bring a lot of the life lessons I’ve learned back to the city... I want to see if I’ve changed. Like I write my goals. One is academic and one is my Dad in general, and then on another page it’s like things I have to change about myself, so I can do better in life, and have a happier life.

Another participant reported, “that different version of myself, that better, kinder, wiser person, I want that person to be with me always. That’s the person I hope I can introduce to people for the rest of my life.” By approaching pre-existing relationships and new relationships in more positive ways, and/or attempting to maintain the “new-self” that was described, all participants reported on their desires to bring their learning from a wilderness program back into their everyday lives.

### **Summary**

Chapter four presented the results of this present study. As this study was a heuristic inquiry aimed at exploring if participants’ reports about how their knowledge and beliefs about the foundations of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation on a wilderness program, results were presented in two ways. First, the individual depictions of each participant were presented, outlining each participant’s story of experience. Second, the composite depiction of the participants’ collective experience was presented. The composite depiction consisted of six main themes. The first theme explored participant’s experiences with personal change and development. Within this theme, increases in technical skills, increases in confidence and a sense of “new-self” were outlined as the sub-themes. The second theme centred on participants’ experiences of conflict

development and resolution. The sub-themes included; major perceived conflicts; dealing with conflicts; and conflict as essential to relationship development. The fourth theme explored participants' experiences with relationship change and development. Within this theme, the sub-themes were: initial individualism and alienation; finding common ground with others; seeing group success as individual success; putting the needs of the group over their own needs; experiencing personal benefit from supporting others; and experiencing the benefits of teamwork. The fifth theme was focused on the factors that were identified by participants as being responsible for the changes in the way they saw themselves, saw others, and saw the group in general. Based on participant reports, the sub-themes included: the experience of shared challenge; the remote and beautiful setting; the experience of sharing a unique experience and creating unique memories; and experiencing a necessary reliance of each other. The sixth and final theme was the desire of participants to bring their learning from the wilderness leadership program back to their everyday lives. The sub-themes included: approaching old relationships differently; approaching new relationships differently; and a desire to maintain their new-self. The individual depictions and these themes serve as a representation of the lived experiences of participants in this present study. They represent the ways in which participants experienced shifts in their knowledge and beliefs congruent with certain foundations of social justice, and the ways in which participants experienced shifts in the way they view themselves in relation to others.

### **Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications**

The purpose of this chapter is to integrate the major findings of this present study with the relevant literature, to discuss the implications of these findings, and to provide recommendations for future research. This chapter is organized into two main sections. The first section is comprised of three themes that address the purpose of this present study and are related to the development of knowledges and beliefs that are congruent with the foundations of social justice. I incorporate relevant literature to investigate each theme and to discuss the implications and questions that arose. I also forward several recommendations for future research throughout this section. Following this, I outline the connections and congruencies between each theme and the development of certain foundations of social justice.

The second section is comprised of the three remaining central themes that emerged through an analysis of participant reports. Although these do not directly relate to the development of the knowledge or beliefs about the foundations of social justice, they do represent an important part of participants' experiences. As heuristic inquiry finds that all participant experiences are valid and valuable, these themes will be explicated as additional findings (Moustakas, 1990). This section also draws on relevant literature to investigate each theme and to discuss the implications and questions that arose. As in the first section, several recommendations for future research are put forward. In the remaining pages of this chapter, I will present the overall conclusions, and present my own reflections on the research process and study results. Finally, I will conclude this present study with the creative synthesis – a creative depiction of the study's core themes and meanings (Moustakas, 1990).

**Themes Relating to the Development of the Foundations of Social Justice**

The three themes that are related to the foundations of social justice that were previously explicated are: (a) experienced conflict development and resolution; (b) relationship change and development; and (c) a shift from a “me” to “we” mentality. As previously stated, this present study conceives social justice as the positive interactions and collaboration of a group that works towards a society in which all people are able to lead a fulfilled life (Goodman, 2000; Okosun, 2009). This present study has already outlined the main foundations of this relationship-focused view of social justice, which include positive social interactions, equal cooperation, interdependence, the demonstration of respect, reciprocal relationships, and acceptance of difference (Applebaum, 2008; Coates, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2008; Fraser, 1997; Goodman, 2000; North, 2006; Young, 1990). Each of the above themes will now be discussed in relation to this view of social justice and these foundations.

**Conflict development and resolution.** As outlined in chapter four, participants emphasized the interpersonal conflicts that arose on their wilderness expedition. For example, one participant reported in her journal, “there is constant bickering.” Another participant described how the arguments progressively escalated throughout the first two weeks of the program. In addition to the reports of conflict, participants reported on experiencing conflict resolution and how both of these experiences were important for the development of positive relationships during the wilderness program. These experiences follow a pattern of small group development that was outlined by Tuckman and Jensen (1977). Tuckman and Jensen outlined that small groups (i.e. a group in which each person is able to recall each other member) develop according to five stages. These

stages are (a) forming, (b) storming, (c) norming, (d) performing, and (e) adjourning.

Although it was created over 30 years ago, Bonebright (2010), who completed a literature review on the development and usage of this model, reported that the model maintains its strong relevance. This model, commonly referred to as Tuckman's model of group development, is widely accepted in group work arenas (Cassidy, 2007; Miller, 2003). In Tuckman's model, the second stage of group development, storming, describes a period where individuals in a group realize that their own expectations do not parallel those of the group, creating conflict within the group (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

Relevant to the results of this present study, participants described an extended period of conflict (or storming), and a return to conflict, even after resolution. One participant described how he felt that the group was not developing as his other wilderness program groups had in the past and that they seemed to be arguing for longer than he felt was normal. Another participant described a pattern over several weeks during the program as "fight, resolve, fight, resolve, fight, resolve," reporting on his frustrations of a seemingly never-ending cycle. In this regard, the results of this study do not necessarily fit with Tuckman's linear model. Cassidy (2007) supports this and has found that several researchers have also described in their own studies how groups have not fit into this model (Cassidy, 2007). Moreover, Cassidy completed a meta-analysis of group development during outdoor experiences and proposed that the conflict, or storming stage, be taken out of the group development model in outdoor contexts as researchers placed it in so many different points in the model. In this regard, participant reports from this present study may contradict Cassidy's conclusion. The findings of this present study show that the storming stage was cited often and in detail by participants

and this corresponds with my own experiences. Furthermore, conflict and conflict resolution were extremely influential for group interaction for the remainder of the program, according to participant reports, mine included. Thus, I believe that the conflict/storming stage experienced by participants does not fit into the linear view of Tuckman's model, but should rather be typified by a conception of the model that allows for "jumping" from stage to stage, or a cycling of the stages. Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff and Breunig (2006) have provided such a conception of Tuckman's model, describing the model as a spring, where groups can remain in one stage for prolonged periods and cycle back through to beginning stages, even when later stages have been reached.

While participants' experiences of conflict may fit neatly into Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff and Breunig's (2006) conception of Tuckman's model, they do not fit as conveniently into another seminal model of group development and behavior put forth by Jones (1973). Jones' model is focused on a group's methods of task completion at each stage of group development as outlined in Tuckman's model (Banet, 1976; Jones, 1973). Jones contends that during the conflict/storming stage of group development individuals in a group organize to get work done and an increased amount of work is typically achieved in this period. Reports from participants on the WLP, however, do not fit into this model. Participants described portages, setting up camp and taking down camp for a large part of the expedition, including their storming stage, as very unorganized. One participant reported that very little work was done and that it took participants a long time to complete even simple tasks due to a high level of disorganization. This departure from Jones' model might have been caused by the extended period of conflict or the return to conflict that was described by participants. Furthermore, the sources of conflict that

participants reported led to conflict that was passionate and consuming, which may have interfered with the participants' ability to organize, either individually or as a group.

These sources of conflict will now be discussed in more detail.

Specific to this present study, participants reported that while conflicts arose over a variety of things, the main sources of conflict throughout the program were food, unbalanced work sharing, and clashing personalities. Of these, food was by far the most discussed and most passionate source of conflict. One participant described the conflict over food as people being very snappy with each other when food was involved. Four additional participants described their own stress over food and how there would often be arguments over serving sizes and extra food that some had access to.

The stress over food is an important finding to discuss here because participants described how the tension over food overshadowed every activity and seemed to pervade all other aspects of the expedition, causing conflict often. Potter (1997) supports these findings and described food as a main source of conflict in wilderness expeditions. This perceived lack of access to food, and the tension and conflict that stems from it has been documented as a common occurrence on wilderness expeditions and is formally known as *food stress* (Harvey & Simer, 1990). Food stress has also been described in the context of larger populations (Minnis, 1985). Minnis (1985) described that when a population or group of people that is normally well-fed experience food shortage, this results in *acute food stress*. Acute food stress is different for each individual, but can often cause feelings of stress, interpersonal conflict, and a general decrease in productivity. This description of acute food stress might also be applied to the WLP group during their expedition. They represent a group of people who normally have

access to adequate amounts of food, but during their expedition consistently felt as though they were not getting enough, despite the fact that they were receiving enough calories, according to wilderness expedition food guides. Just as Minnis found in larger populations, the decrease of available food and the perceived shortage of food experienced by the group on the WLP caused people to become stressed and come into conflict with each other.

However, new evidence suggests that stress over food on wilderness expeditions may also be physiological (Ocobok & Gookin, 2012). In their recent study, Ocobok and Gookin (2012) found that individuals that are very active in a backcountry setting can use up to 7,000 or 8,000 calories per day, which is as much as 30% higher than preexisting models for caloric expenditure. On the WLP, meals were packed to compensate for the presumed caloric expenditure of participants, which was calculated using one such preexisting model, the NOLS guide (Pearson & Clelland, 2004). Based on the amount of activity and the average weight of participants, participants were rationed approximately 3,500 – 4,000 calories per day, which, according to Ocobok and Gookin, may have been up to 4,500 calories too few. Thus, participants' reports that there was not enough food may have been accurate and not purely psychological. Ocobok and Gookin also uncovered that males were subject to a greater loss of body mass than were females and thus needed more calories than females to compensate for their energy expenditure. This supports participant reports in this present study, as all male participants on the WLP described feeling hungry and being stressed about the amount food, whereas the female participant did not. In this present study, the male participants' perceived and potentially real lack of access to sufficient calories was cause for significant amounts of stress over



the course of the program. Thus, Ocobok and Gookin's findings provide evidence that the stress and conflict over food experienced by participants – primarily male participants, were not just psychological, but may have had some physiological basis as well.

The conflict and stress over food can also be understood in a social context. In a variety of ways, food acts as a symbol within society (Keeling, 2001). Specifically, in contexts where individuals are unable to control their surrounding environments or there is a limited or controlled access to food, food can become a symbol for power (Goddard, 2006). On wilderness expeditions, participants are subject to several factors they cannot control, such as weather and the natural environment. Furthermore, food is typically packed ahead of time and rationed throughout the expedition. Both of these factors were true for the WLP. Thus, in the context of the WLP, food can also be seen as a symbol of control and power. With food overtly and/or subconsciously acting as a symbol for power within the WLP group, participants' conflict over food may be viewed as a struggle for power. Phipps (1987) has also suggested that many conflicts on expeditions arise from contention for power and control. In viewing food as a symbol of power and the conflict over food as a struggle for power, food may present an aspect of the wilderness program that actually impeded the development of social justice. Specifically, the control that the leaders had over the food (and the lack of control that the campers had over food) contributed to an unequal power dynamic between the leaders and the campers. Furthermore, this division may have served to reestablish the unequal power dynamic between the campers and leaders. As several of the foundations of social justice (i.e. reciprocity and equal cooperation) are associated with issues of power and equality,

the increased power that the leaders may have had with regards to food can be viewed as an impediment to the development of the foundations of social justice.

Furthermore, as mentioned in chapter four, conflict over food and food stress represented one area where participants did not develop a sense of communalism, which they were able to develop in many other areas. Many studies have reported that participants develop a sense of communalism, community, and care for others over the course of a wilderness program (this will be further explicated later in this chapter). Moreover, in my own experience, mealtime, in both the front country and backcountry is a time when people come together, share, and engage with one another in positive ways. In light of this, it surprised me to discover that in this present study, food became a barrier to communalism and was the cause of conflict and stress. Another possible explanation for food becoming a barrier to communalism might be that food represents a link to the front country. Food is one of the few constants between the front country and the backcountry. Thus, even if participants' roles and behaviours were shifted during the wilderness program, the necessity, desire, and ritual of eating may have shifted very little. This may have caused participants to revert to old roles and behaviours, including the individualism they described at the beginning of the program. Viewing food as both a symbol for power and social control as well as a link to participant's front country roles provides another explanation for the large role that food played in creating conflict. It is clear that, food can impact the participants of an expedition psychologically, physically and socially. Although food in its simplest conception is simply the calories required to sustain life, perhaps in the context of a wilderness expedition it fills much more complex roles; when the experiences surrounding food are negative, the stress and conflict that

follow can pervade many other aspects of that expedition, as was described by participants in this present study.

The conflict surrounding food on the expedition can be linked to certain foundations of social justice. These will be discussed later. However, food itself can also be connected to social justice overall. In a more general sense, food was an important resource during the expedition. Forsyth (2009) outlined that perceived unfair sharing of resources is a common source of conflict in groups. Furthermore, Forsyth linked the fair distribution of resources in a group to distributive justice, which, as previously described is the fairness in the distribution of rights and resources. Thus, the conflicts over food that were experienced on the WLP can be viewed as the group members experiencing (or not experiencing) distributive justice. Although experiences with distributive justice were not the main focus of this present study, this still presents an interesting link with experiences related to social justice in general.

Based on the above analysis, organizations might use this information in three ways. First, I would recommend that organizations and leaders avoid food stress situations by ensuring they are packing enough food to compensate for a potential calories expenditure of 7,000 calories per day if participants will be very active throughout the expedition (Ocobok & Gookin, 2012). Second, discussing the topic of food stress with leaders and participants before and during the expedition may be helpful in combating psychological or perceived food stress. Third, I recommend that participants be involved in food-based decisions and work, including food packing. This may help participants to feel as though they have more control in regard to their food. This may lead to reduced conflict and reduce the stress that can permeate into other

activities during the expedition. This may also help to further develop communalism in participants instead of food being a barrier to communalism. Throughout my investigation of the role of food and food stress during wilderness expeditions, I was disappointed by the lack of studies that have been conducted in recent years on this topic. Although the recent work conducted by Ocobok and Gookin (2012) on daily caloric requirements on backcountry expeditions is beneficial, I recommend that the experience and effects of undergoing food stress on wilderness programs be examined in the future.

A second main source of conflict that was described by participants was unbalanced work sharing. Potter (1997) supports this finding, and has also pointed out that unbalanced work sharing can be another major source of conflict in wilderness expeditions. Unbalanced work sharing has also been positively correlated to the number of group conflicts that occurred during a small-group wilderness expedition in Russia (Leon, Kanfer, Hoffman, & Dupre, 1994). Leon et al. (1994) found that when participants perceived unfairness in their daily tasks, there were more arguments between the group members. Perceived unbalanced work sharing has also been documented as a source of frustration and conflict in small groups in general, when one or more group members perceives another as lazy or slacking off (Baker & Clark, 2010). Furthermore, perceived unfair work sharing can actually be a barrier to group effectiveness (Sewcharan & Parumasur, 2009). This may provide one plausible explanation for the reports from participants that group tasks seemed to be more challenging and took longer during the first half of the program, when most of the reports of unbalanced work sharing were recorded.

Unbalanced work sharing may have also contributed to certain stereotypes about male and female roles during the expedition. The female participant on the WLP described her frustration at filling a traditional gender role and was often cleaning up, doing dishes, and setting up tents more than her male counterparts. She reported that she did “70% of the campsite work” and often “picked up after the boys.” She also reported on several occasions feeling “overworked and underappreciated.” For this female participant, the most frustrating aspect of her situation was not simply that she did more work than others but that the work she did was valued less than the work the males gravitated towards. Specifically, she described how portaging was viewed as one of the most important skills. Newbery (2003) has drawn similar conclusions, finding that “accomplishments are hierarchized and placed on either side of a constructed gender binary, so that it is more probable that a pinnacle experience on a trip involved carrying a canoe than it did cooking an exceptional meal” (p. 211). The lack of appreciation for her different skills that this female participant reported may also represent another hindrance to the development of social justice. As discussed previously, appreciating difference is an important foundation of social justice. Further to that, the traditional gender roles and expectations that were present on this expedition may have also curtailed this female participant’s ability to choose her own roles, identify within the group, and lowered her overall self-determination – all of which are important in working towards social justice (Bell, 1997).

The particular experiences of this participant raise questions about how to best approach the undervaluing of certain jobs on an expedition. Should all participants be required to be equally involved in all aspects of an expedition? Or should leaders focus

on affirming that all types of work are equally valuable to an expedition's success? I agree with Newbery's (2003) contention that questions of this sort may not have clear right or wrong answers, but that the power lies in the asking, and consideration of such questions.

The third primary source of conflict that was experienced by participants was clashing personalities, although this was reported less frequently by participants than the two previous sources. One participant described the personalities of the group through the metaphor of lines travelling in different directions, which eventually clash with each other. Two other participants described the personalities as being "in tension" or "clashing" with each other. These personality tensions were the source of many conflicts throughout the program and according to participant reports, decreased the overall effectiveness of the group. Opposing or clashing personalities has been outlined as the catalyst of more ruined wilderness expeditions than any other factor, including bad weather or accidents (Sole & Powers, 2003). While participants described personality clashes leading to conflict and poor productivity in this study, they also reported that their expedition was ultimately successful, with all group members completing the program and arriving at the end of the river with a positive view of the experience. Thus, although their personality clashes did have some negative impacts, it did not lead to a failed expedition in their view.

While participants did experience many conflicts, they also reported experiencing resolution of those conflicts in mostly positive ways, and placed conflict as important to relationship development. For example, one participant described how "[talking through conflict] brought me a lot closer to them." Participants described how working through

conflict was challenging, but that it ultimately lead to closer, more positive relationships. Potter (1997) proposed that fostering a healthy attitude about conflicts and discussing them as a group leads to better group dynamics, which in turn ultimately leads to enhanced expedition behaviour. Supporting this, Drozdal (1999) examined the conflict development and resolution of a group of women on a two-week wilderness expedition, and found that conflict and its resolution helped to establish group roles and a better understanding of the relationship dynamics. More recently, Tucker (2009) reported that when a group of adolescents experienced conflict and its resolution during an outdoor adventure education program, they developed more positive ways of interacting with one another.

Given the successful evolution of conflict resolution reported in participants' responses in this present study, I now wonder what role the leaders might have had in facilitating this success. Group leaders of outdoor education programs impact group behaviours and dynamics (Glass & Benshoff, 2002). This would also hold true in instances of conflict. In any group conflict scenario, the facilitation (or lack thereof) of conflict resolution by leaders or supervisors can lead to a situation being resolved or not (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005). Thus, the actions of the leaders in this present study would have inevitably impacted both the lack of conflict resolution early on in the program, and the evolving success of conflict resolution as the program went on. Thus, if leaders do in fact impact conflict and conflict resolution during a wilderness expedition, this would suggest that training and practice in conflict resolution strategies is essential for wilderness leaders prior to leading wilderness programs. This might help to inform leaders about how to approach conflict so that participants can maximize any learning

that arises from conflict. Warren (2002) has also emphasized the importance of teaching wilderness leaders about conflict and conflict resolution. Warren suggested that educating leaders about conflict and conflict resolution is actually an important component of social justice training.

Despite the leaders' potential role in the development of certain foundations of social justice, three participants' reports also allude to a strong division between the leaders and the campers. Participants described how the line between the three leaders and six campers was well established and maintained. One participant also described how the leaders maintained a sense of power over the campers during the program. That participant reported feeling that he was being treated like a child, and was resentful that he was not allowed to make his own decisions at times. As mentioned previously, the creation of this unequal power dynamic between the leaders and campers represents an area where the development of certain foundations of social justice may have been thwarted. This may be valuable information for wilderness program providers.

Wilderness program providers may want to avoid the creation of this power dynamic by ensuring that participants are more involved in the trip planning, preparation and overall decisions during the program. By creating an environment that is more democratic than authoritarian, leaders may be able to diminish the power differential between themselves and the campers.

Despite the inferences that can be drawn between the role of leaders and conflict resolution and the few reports from participants that include the leaders, questions remain about the lack of focus placed on the role of the leaders in this present study. Specifically within the context of conflict, I now wonder what the dynamic of the leader group was



and how their own conflict (or lack thereof) played a role in shaping their own group dynamic and the ways in which they approached conflict within the larger group. I now regret not having collected data on leader actions and roles in the program. This presents a limitation to this present study.

Viewed through a more general lens, conflict has also been seen in a positive light, as a way to help people connect to others (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005; de Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997). Conflict, when resolved positively, can provide a means to present an individual's needs and opinions, while simultaneously creating increased understanding of other points of view, and reducing egocentrism (de Dreu & Van de Vliert, 1997). When conflict is viewed as an opportunity, individuals are able to shape their conflict experience to provide personal growth and growth of relationships (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005). By engaging in conflict, individuals can learn what is important to others and how to better interact in the future, creating more honest and open relationships (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005). Thus, conflict can create a sense of uniqueness and individuality, as well as a sense of connectedness to others. This sentiment parallels participants' reports that the conflict they experienced brought them "closer" to other members of the group and provided them with an opportunity to share their opinions.

While the results of this present study are in agreement with the benefits of conflict and conflict resolution, they simultaneously present a contrary perspective given participants' reports that only certain types of conflict can be beneficial to relationship development. Recent literature has outlined that in general, there are two main types of conflict: cognitive and affective (De Dreu, 1997; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Keashly & Nowell, 2011; Mooney, Holason, & Amason, 2007; Ochsner et al., 2009). *Cognitive*

*conflict* typically involves resources and the manner in which tasks are completed, and is referred to as positive, beneficial conflict (Mooney et al., 2007). Contrarily, *affective conflict* typically involves individuals' behaviours, values or personal opinions and is referred to as negative conflict (Mooney et al., 2007). Affective conflict has been described as conflict that leads to hostile, distrustful and closed off relationship development (Amason, 1995; Mooney et al., 2007). As such, it has been recommended that groups work to avoid this type of conflict (Mooney et al., 2007).

This view that affective conflict is purely detrimental to positive group development represents a departure from the findings of this present study. Participants in this present study described experiences of positive relationship development resulting from conflicts that were both affective and cognitive. In fact, one participant recalled a conflict that focused on the behaviours and attitudes of other participants; she recalled this as being one of the most productive conflicts, leading to more open and positive relationships. Thus, the findings of this present study point to a view of cognitive and affective conflict in which both can be seen as positive, and capable of leading to the development of positive relationships. The implications of this will be described below.

The different types of conflicts that arose from a variety of sources during wilderness programs were important to the interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships of participants. This connection between small group conflict, conflict resolution and the development of positive relationships can be viewed as a link between experiences during a wilderness program and certain foundations of social justice. As social justice has been conceived in this present study as focused on relationships and individuals collaborating and interacting together in positive ways (Goodman, 2000; Okosun, 2009), and one of the

foundations of this view of social justice is the development of these social interactions and relationships, it is reasonable to conclude that a program that leads to participants experiencing positive relationship development through conflict can in fact provide experiences congruent with developing this foundation of social justice. As previously mentioned, this link is predicated on the assumption that developing relationships with others that are positive, respectful, and mutually beneficial is an important foundation of, or “first-step” in working towards social justice, as it is conceived in this present study (Goodman, 2000). The connection between a program that develops positive, respectful relationships and the foundations of social justice has also been highlighted by Buote and Berglund (2010), who found a positive correlation between the development of positive relationships and the foundations that underlie social justice.

Further to the creation of the types of relationships that are congruent with certain foundations of social justice, conflict itself can be connected to developing the foundations of social justice. Conflict has been theorized to foster moral development by facilitating growth in the ways people think and by providing an opportunity to experience perspectives other than their own (Reimer et al., 1983). This moral development, then, is what helps individuals form opinions and decisions about what is right personally, socially, and politically (St. John, 2008). Thus, an indirect link is established between interpersonal conflict and conceptions of what is socially just.

Additionally, Berman (1997) described that through the process of conflicts being resolved in positive ways, individuals:

move from a focus solely on themselves to one that takes either the self's or the other's perspective, then to balancing the two perspectives through reciprocity, and finally, to balancing the perspectives through finding mutual goals. Considering another's perspective is the force that moves this development. (p.

92)

In this assertion, Berman connected the process of experiencing conflict and effective conflict resolution with developing perspectives of reciprocity, which, as outlined above, is another foundation of social justice (North, 2006).

In summation, participant reports that conflict and the development of conflict resolution were important experiences of the wilderness program are supported by past research as well. One important aspect of participation in wilderness programs is the development of positive relationships and interactions, which is congruent with one of the foundations of social justice as was outlined above. Furthermore, conflict and conflict resolution can also be linked to the development of moral development and reciprocity. This link may have implications for social justice educators and wilderness program providers. Social justice educators may use these findings to engage students in conflict and positive conflict resolution to foster moral development and create positive, reciprocal relationships. More specifically, social justice educators could allow conflicts to develop naturally among groups and then facilitate the positive resolution of these conflicts. Through this process, individuals might gain an appreciation for others' opinions and create reciprocal relationships through working to find mutual goals (Berman, 1997). Wilderness program providers may choose to provide increased training for leaders in positive conflict resolution and specifically train leaders on how to positively approach conflict over food, unbalanced work sharing, and clashing personalities. Warren (2002) has suggested that training about conflict resolution can take many forms including role-playing, hypothetical scenarios, group challenges and in-depth discussions. Phipps (1987) has also proposed strategies for training leaders in

conflict resolution. Phipps suggested that conflict should be stimulated by challenging a group with hypothetical scenarios in which there are several possible solutions (i.e. how would you survive in a desert given certain tools?). When conflict arises over what choices need to be made to survive, the facilitator can take the opportunity to discuss how to resolve conflict to maximize learning. This approach might be used to train leaders about the specific conflicts that arose in this present study by focusing these hypothetical scenarios, in-depth discussions, and role-playing scenarios on conflicts that might arise in a group over food, unbalanced work-sharing, and personality clashes. This would allow leaders to learn about conflict resolution while simultaneously learning about the specific type of conflicts they might face on a wilderness program.

**Relationship change and development.** As outlined in chapter four, participants described experiences with shifting relationships throughout their wilderness program. Overall, participants described how relationships at the beginning of the program were negative and strained. Furthermore, participants reported that other trip participants were very different from them, citing these differences as barriers to positive relationships. Contrarily, at the end of the program, participants reported having more positive, respectful relationships with others. This shift will be described in more detail below.

There has been significant discourse on relationships and outdoor education. In fact, as outlined in chapter two, Martin and Priest (1986) claimed that the *fundamental topic* of outdoor education is relationships. Several researchers have also shown that in general, wilderness programs create more positive interpersonal relationships (Anderson et al., 1997; Gass, 1987; Gin, 1998; McKenzie & Blenkinsop, 2006; Mitten, 1994; Sharpe, 2005; Winterdyk & Roesch, 1982).

In this present study participants described how they learned to appreciate the difference and individuality among them. The development of appreciation of difference or individuality in outdoor and wilderness education has also been reported in past literature. Halliday (1999) similarly found that appreciation of difference can be promoted through outdoor challenge courses. While challenge courses are not exactly parallel to wilderness programs, they are based on similar philosophies, which have been explicated in chapter two. Further to this, Cassidy (2007) suggested that a best practice in outdoor and adventure education, can and should promote the appreciation for different talents and individual skills.

More specifically, participants reported in this present study, that they understood that people had unique skill sets, with some participants excelling at portaging while others excelled at cooking. While these reports do reflect the acknowledgment and appreciation of difference, they also contradict the aforementioned reports of the female participant that others did not value the campsite work she did as heavily as they did portaging and paddling. Thus, while acknowledging and articulating an appreciation of the unique skills of others is important, of equal importance is simultaneously acknowledging the value of different types of work. Perhaps an opportunity for group members to openly share appreciation for each other on a daily basis would work to ensure group members knew their work was valued. Sharing appreciation is a common practice on NOLS expeditions during A.N.C.H.O.R. meetings. A.N.C.H.O.R. is an acronym for appreciation, news, concerns, humor, observations, and reading; together these words are used to debrief a day's events (Gookin & Leach, 2008). During the appreciation component of an A.N.C.H.O.R. debrief, group members share what/who

they appreciate that day. This might be an ideal time for both leaders and participants to convey their appreciation to others for all of the different jobs and roles people take on.

In addition to the appreciation of difference, participants also disclosed that they were seeing others on the program in a new way – that they saw others as important to the program, and to them personally. One participant described himself as a tree growing in the forest and that the people on the program were all important for his growth.

Another participant reported that he found each person had their own talents and skills, and found that he valued different people for different reasons. He also felt valued and appreciated for the specific contributions that he made. In these reports, participants described how their relationships with others came to be those in which they viewed others as important and valuable, and felt valued in return. In these reports, participants are describing reciprocal relationships. As previously mentioned, relationships with reciprocity are those in which individuals both contribute to and benefit from the relationship, placing each member as valued and important (North, 2006). Congruent with these findings, Martin (1993) found that youth that participated in a wilderness program showed increased sense of reciprocity. More recently, Beames and Atencio (2008) theorized that outdoor education promotes the development of understanding about reciprocity.

While reciprocity is no doubt important to making people feel valued and important, evolutionary psychologists Buunk and Schaufeli (1999) proposed that reciprocity might be of even greater importance to individuals. Buunk and Schaufeli proposed that humans have actually evolved to depend on reciprocity in their interpersonal relationships, and that a lack of reciprocity is accompanied by

psychological and physical negative side effects. In a variety of interpersonal relationships, humans have come to depend on the development of reciprocity to be functional, happy and healthy. Thus, while reciprocity is important to the development of positive interpersonal relationships, it may also positively impact human health and wellbeing.

Further to their reports of reciprocal relationships, participants in this present study reported on recognizing the positive elements each person had to offer and saw others with more respect. Participants' accounts also revealed that they recognized the value of others' contributions and skills. Thus, the development of respectful relationships, where one individual sees value in another, was described in a variety of ways. Several studies support this finding and have outlined that the development of respect of others and their unique contributions, were developed over the course of a wilderness program (Brodin, 2009; Potter, 1992; Russell, 2006; Russell, 2007). Further to these reports that participants saw those around them with increased respect, were reports that participants saw others as family. This recalls a type of relationship that is comfortable and unconditional, in which one person sees another as part of himself/herself. Creating relationships that replicate feelings of family have also been described in past outdoor program literature (Kimball & Bacon, 1993). Kimball and Bacon (1993) proposed that the atmosphere created by positive group interaction in outdoor programs could lead to a sense of family among a group.

While relationship development is not a novel or surprising finding, I do wonder if participants were influenced in their reports by writing and saying what they thought they "should." Both of the wilderness programs that participants took part in included



lessons on group development and relationship development. Thus, I wonder if the discussions and readings that participants took part in, gave them preconceived notions of what “should” or “would” happen in terms of relationship development. Given that there is a sentiment in the wilderness program industry that participants will quickly become close with one another during a wilderness program (no doubt fostered by the many studies outlined above that have evidenced this), participants may have felt as though that was what they should report as well. In fact, most of the participants, in their first interview described their predictions that positive relationship development would happen, and quickly. Past research has shown that participants, particularly younger participants sometimes provide a researcher with the information that they think is “right” (Klesges et al., 2004; Phillips, 2009). Even so, I do not doubt that participants did experience some forms of relationship development as they reported, especially when these results are in line with so many corroborating studies.

Several of the above participant experiences with relationship development are also congruent with certain foundations of social justice. As previously mentioned, the development of positive relationships has been theorized to be an essential “first-step” in working towards social justice. More specifically, the particular sub-themes that were explicated by participants in the ways that their relationships changed and developed are also directly linked to the aforementioned foundations of social justice. One of the foundations of social justice is the acknowledgement and acceptance of difference (Fraser 1997; Young, 1990). Both Fraser (1997) and Young (1990) outlined that social justice is predicated on creating positive relationships in which all individuals both acknowledge and accept the difference that exists between people. Applebaum (2008) and Cochran-

Smith (2008) have also proposed that fostering relationships where individual abilities and differences are celebrated is a valuable manner in which to work towards social justice more specifically within an educational context. The notion of reciprocal relationships has also been outlined as one of the foundations of social justice (North, 2006). North (2006) proposed that the types of relationship that must be created should be reciprocal ones, in which all individuals are viewed as valued, contributing members.

In sum, participants in this study described that they experienced changes and developments in their relationships during their wilderness program, culminating in relationships that were based on respect appreciation of difference, and having a more positive view of others in their group. Relationships based on the appreciation of differences and reciprocity are congruent with certain foundations of social justice. This finding supports the overall congruencies between experiences on a wilderness program and certain foundations of social justice. This development of relationships based on appreciation of difference and reciprocity may represent an important “first-step” in developing the actual foundations of social justice knowledge and beliefs. However, in order to continue to develop these foundations, additional learning will need to occur. While fully exploring and understanding what these next steps are is out of the scope of this present study, I can hypothesize what next steps *might* need to be taken, given the theories of teaching social justice that were explicated in the literature review. Using the direction of several social justice pedagogues and researchers, it seems that several effective approaches to social justice learning use direct experiences with certain foundations of social justice (i.e. cooperation, care for others and positive social interaction) and recognition and understanding of how and why those experiences are

connected to social justice. This recognition and understanding might be promoted through in-depth discussions and/or journals. In this present study, while participants may have had experiences that are congruent with certain foundations of social justice, they did not have an opportunity to discuss these experiences or overtly relate them to social justice in any capacity. Thus, it might be necessary to explicate the links of the learned concepts of appreciating difference and reciprocal relationships with social justice. I would recommend a program debrief in which participants and experienced facilitators explicitly demonstrate how participants' learning is congruent with certain foundations of social justice.

**Shift from “me to “we”.** This theme, articulated as the shift from a “me” mentality to a “we” mentality among participants describes the experiences of the transition from an individualized way of thinking, to a communal way of thinking. The phrase “me” to “we” has been used recently in literature surrounding the development of positive relationships and community building within education (Gibbs, 1995; Keating, 2009; Keilberger & Keilberger, 2008). Perhaps most notably, the phrase has been used by the not for profit organization, Free the Children, and its founders Craig and Mark Keilberger to articulate a philosophy that redefines happiness and success by shifting from an individualized “me” focus, to a “we” focus, in which people work towards bettering the communities they belong to (Keilberger & Keilberger, 2008). In fact, *Me to We* became the title and focus of a book authored by the Keilberger and Keilberger in 2008. The following section uses this phrase to summarize the experiences of participants over the course of their wilderness program as they described a shift from their perceived individualism to a sense of communalism and interdependence with

others in the program. At the end of this section, I will return to the use of this phrase within social justice literature.

At the outset of their wilderness program, participants described experiences of acting in individualized ways, and noticing this behaviour in others. As mentioned in chapter four, one participant reported described the group as “every man for himself.” Participants experienced, both in themselves and in others, a sense of individualism and focus on the “me”. Keating (2009) described this individualism and “every man for himself” mind frame, as a “me” consciousness, and finds that this mentality focuses on, “what’s in it for me, how can I succeed?” (p. 12). Hales (2006) also found that young people who are taking part in outdoor education programs today have individualistic mentalities. Hales outlined that information communication technologies, like mobile telephones and the internet, are one reason for this. My own experiences as a teenager and a teacher in the age of mobile technology and social media, have lead me to a similar conclusion.

Certain participants also described feeling alienated by others based on their differences. Over the course of the program at least three participants reported feeling that others were judging them, and marginalizing them. While some participants reported that this feeling diminished or disappeared over the course of the program, at least one participant described how he felt marginalized to some degree throughout the program. This type of feeling of marginalization represents another possible impediment to “authentic” social justice. Working to reduce the marginalization of individuals and groups remains one of the overarching goals of social justice, as was discussed in chapter two. As such, the continued marginalization, or even feelings of marginalization

experienced by the participant in the WLP presents another example where social justice was thwarted.

Further to this, several participants also described the formation of cliques during the program. Overall, participants described the creation of two separate cliques at the beginning of the program. In the WLP, the cliques were identified as separated based on whether the individual smoked or not. However, what is also interesting is that those individuals belonging to the non-smoking clique were also those participants that had previous experiences with wilderness programs and also those that self-identified as more serious and responsible. Over the course of the program, the separation of the two cliques diminished but did not disappear entirely. Cliques can lead to the alienation of individuals and in some cases the mistreatment of those individuals who are not part of the clique (Fiske, Gilbert, & Lindzey, 2010). Furthermore, the creation of more than one clique in a small group can lead to negative conflict between the two cliques and damage relationships within the group overall (Fiske, Gilbert, & Lindzey, 2010). Thus, the creation of cliques on the WLP may have hindered the positive relationship development that participants described and also led to the sustained alienation of certain individuals. It can be further concluded that the formation of cliques, and the resulting effects on the group may have also hindered the development of certain foundations of social justice. Given this, wilderness program providers may want to educate their leaders on attempting to diminish the formation of cliques. This might be accomplished by changing who sleeps in the tents together each night, who paddles together each day, and who completes various tasks together. It may also be important to ensure that leaders themselves are not forming a clique.

Participants described that one important step away from this feeling of individualism and alienation, or “me” mentality was finding commonalities with others in the group. This finding is congruent with the view of Keating (2009), who theorized that commonalities can actually serve as pathways into positive interactions and relationships with others, and can work to make the differences among individuals less isolating. By identifying and discussing the commonalities that exist, even among seemingly very different people, individuals can begin to break down barriers between them and create a sense of togetherness or community. The importance participants placed on finding common ground may have been due to the feelings of alienation reported by participants. As one participant described, “there is no one else” to communicate with or feel connected to. Thus, certain participants felt that it was important to make connections with others in this backcountry setting, as there were limited people to connect with. In any setting, but specifically new and challenging settings, connectedness to others can be important to human well-being and happiness. While finding common ground, and the motivations to do so may have implications for new groups looking to foster connectedness among individualized people, in this present study, it was also an intermediary step in the transition from a “me” mentality to a “we” mentality. This “we” mentality will be discussed and analyzed next.

Nearing the end of their journals, and in their post-program interviews, participants reported experiencing personal benefit from supporting others, putting the needs of the group over their own needs, and experiencing the benefits of teamwork. These experiences reflect a “we” mentality. This “we” state has been described as pluralistic representations of the self-in-relationship (Karremans & Van Lange, 2007).

As previously mentioned, participants described experiencing a personal benefit and success from helping others, and feeling that their own success was tied to that of the group. This feeling that an individual's chances of success are greater if those around him/her are successful is referred to as positive interdependence (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Positive interdependence leads to individuals supporting each other's efforts as a means to reach group goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Thus, when participants in this present study realized that their own success was dependent on the success of others, they were in fact experiencing positive interdependence. Others have also discussed the positive interdependence that is created among groups during a wilderness program, or outdoor education programs in general (O'Connell & Cuthbertson, 2009; Stremba & Bisson, 2007).

While this study was effective in identifying the presence of positive interdependence among participants, the reasons and motivations for its development were not concretely explicated in the results. One logical explanation follows the classic social theory that all human action is motivated by the desire to enhance the self, find pleasure, and avoid pain (Katz, 1948). This is similar to the adage that people donate to charity to make themselves feel good, and that all human actions are ultimately selfish. Thus, perhaps on a wilderness program too, the helpful actions of participants are merely a product of a desire to self-preserve combined with the knowledge that a safe and quick return to the front country is more probable with all members happy and healthy. Although selfishness is not typically thought of as being linked to social justice, there are in reality congruencies with certain foundations of social justice. In fact, Dine Goodman (2000), a social justice educator and theorist, claimed that one of the main sources of

motivation for individuals to work towards understanding and developing social justice is self-interest. This self-interest is often driven by a desire to have more positive and comfortable interpersonal relationships and a more positive sense of community (Goodman, 2000). Therefore, even if participants' positive interdependence was motivated by self-interest, it may still be congruent with certain foundations of social justice, and be an important first step in the development of these foundations.

In addition to describing feelings of interdependence, participants experienced a sense of communalism by putting the needs of others over their own and caring about the physical and emotional state of others. This experience of helping others and caring for others, was found to be an important part of an experience on a wilderness program (Witman, 1995). In fact, as mentioned in chapter two, Outward Bound's founder, Kurt Hahn, himself believed that care and compassion for others was fundamental to outdoor education, and education in general (Rolfson, 2000). Quay, Dickenson and Nettleton (2000) also found many links between caring for others and outdoor education by examining the work of many researchers in the fields of psychology and outdoor education. They concluded that outdoor education and the wilderness setting are both ideal and effective in developing care for others.

A third experience that represents this "we" mentality is realizing the importance and necessity of teamwork or cooperation. Participants reported on coming to a realization that working as a team in a cooperative way, with each member contributing was essential to achieving success. The ability of a wilderness program to provide an experience in which teamwork is a necessity was also described by Mortlock (1994) in his assertion that:



The challenging wilderness journey is potentially an outstanding way not only of developing friendship, but of emphasizing the need for people to work together. Experience can soon show both that lives may well be put further at risk by selfish and thoughtless actions, and that success will best be achieved by efficient teamwork. (p. 80)

Congruent with this, a study by Hlasny (2000) found that one of the main effects of outdoor and experiential education programs was experiencing the importance and benefits of teamwork. Learning the importance of teamwork is another of the main goals of Outward Bound programs, setting the standard for many other outdoor education and wilderness programs that followed (Hattie et al., 1997). Here again, I wonder if some of the participants' desire and readiness to cooperate as a team was ultimately a selfish motivation; a subconscious human desire to avoid pain (in this case, taking longer on portage trails, dumping in rapids etc...). Both the potential for selfish motivations driving participant teamwork and interdependence on wilderness programs would be an intriguing topic for future research.

The experiences of teamwork, caring for others, and interdependence that characterized the "we" mentality are also referred to within the fields of outdoor education and wilderness programs as positive expedition behaviour (Cashel, 1994; Phipps, 2007). As mentioned in chapter two, expedition behaviour is one way that a group interacts with its members and with outside groups during an expedition (Martin et al., 2006). In effective and positive expedition behaviour, individuals will "serve the mission and goals of the group, be as concerned for others as [they] are for [themselves] and treat everyone with dignity and respect." (Gookin, 2006). Several studies have been completed documenting the development of positive expedition behaviour in groups, similar to the behaviour that was described by participants in this present study (Paisley,

Furman, Sibthorp, & Gookin, 2008; Sibthorp, Paisley, & Gookin, 2007). Positive expedition behaviour is a contributing factor to the success of wilderness programs and expeditions (Cashel, 1994). The appearance of negative or poor expedition behaviour has actually been blamed for the failure of several expeditions, and even death of expedition members, in the most extreme cases (Cashel, 1994).

All of the above experiences associated with the “we” mentality can also be linked to certain foundations of social justice, mainly the experience associated with interdependence and cooperation. Interdependence, is one of the foundations of social justice as was proposed by Goodman (2000), who, as outlined in chapter two, described that social justice is predicated on creating mutual and interdependent relationships. Keating (2009) has more recently connected the idea of working towards interdependence and social justice. Keating proposed that when individuals experience and understand interdependence that they will be more willing to work towards positive social change. Thus, when the participants on their wilderness program described that they understood their interdependence to others, Keating theorized that they would be more likely ready to become agents of social change. This state could be conceptualized as being “primed” to develop the foundations of social justice, or being in a ready state to learn and understand about social justice.

The benefits of teamwork and cooperation experienced by participants can also be indirectly linked to the foundations of social justice. Both Goodman (2000) and Cammarota and Romero (2009) have posited that interpersonal cooperation is essential to working towards social justice. Cammarota and Romero maintained that in order to address what Fraser (2003) and Cochran-Smith (2008) deemed to be the root of social

injustice, which is the way people think about and relate to each other, there needs to be a focus on learning to work cooperatively (Cammarota & Romero, 2009).

To conclude, participants in this present study described that they experienced a shift from thinking in an individualized “me” way, to a communal, pluralistic “we” way. They expressed this in their reports about feeling initially individualized and alienated and then having experiences related to interdependence, cooperation, and caring for others. Here again, these are only congruencies with certain foundations of social justice, and next steps would need to be taken to move forward and develop the foundations of social justice learning. The next steps that were outlined in the above section on relationship development and change may also be applied to take this experience of the “we” mentality and use it to solidify a development of certain foundations of social justice in participants.

### **Additional Findings**

As previously mentioned, three of the themes that emerged from participant reports did not focus on the development of the foundations of social justice. However, these results do represent important study findings. These themes include: (a) personal growth and development; (b) bringing learning back to life; and (c) identification of important factors for change. These themes will be further explicated and imbedded into the literature next. Furthermore, one of these themes, identification of important factors for change, also addresses one of the guiding questions of this study.

**Personal growth and development.** As presented in chapter four, participants reported on experiencing both physical and mental personal growth or developments over the course of a wilderness program. This result of personal growth from wilderness

program participation has been well documented in the literature, and was explicated in chapter two. As previously mentioned, Martin and Priest (1986) described that one of the general outcomes of adventure education in a wilderness context is personal growth.

More specifically, in this present study, participants placed importance on their experiences with personal growth, describing a sense of increased confidence, and a sense that they had shifted into a new, more positive person. This sense of existing in a more positive state after a wilderness program was also concluded by Anderson et al. (1997) in their study of the benefits on an integrated adventure program. Separately, the report of feeling more confident after participating in a wilderness program parallels the literature outlined in chapter two and several seminal studies discussed therein. As previously described, Hattie et al. (1997) summarized the findings from 96 studies on acquired life skills on a variety of Outward Bound programs over the course of 30 years. This meta-analysis reported that one of the outcomes of adventure education in wilderness contexts was an increase in an individual's perception of their level of self-control (Hattie et al. 1997). More specifically, self-control can include, but is not limited to, independence, confidence, self-efficacy, self-understanding, assertiveness, decision-making, emotional intelligence, and increased benevolence (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Ewert, 1983; Hattie et al., 1997). Martin (2001) supported this particular (increase in self control) conclusion in his study that examined the benefits of both 22 and nine-day wilderness-focused Outward Bound programs in 150 participants. Martin found an increase in participant relationship with self, including increased self-confidence. Several more recent studies have supported similar findings to those from previous studies, identifying significant increases in participants' self-concept, self-esteem and self-

efficacy in a wide variety of outdoor education programs, several of which were wilderness experience programs (Larson, 2007; Paisley, Furman, Sibthorpe, & Gookin, 2008; Sheard & Golby, 2006).

Participants also reported existing in a more positive and open state. Both positivity and openness have been documented during extended and isolated expeditions. A 2007 study by Stott and Hall revealed that 60 young expeditioners, aged 16-20, reported on personal growth in a variety of ways, including an increased ability to avoid depression and loneliness as well as an increase in enthusiasm and a capacity to motivate others. A separate study focused on isolated expeditions in the Antarctic found that participants reported existing in a more open way with the other member of their group during their expedition (Peri et al., 2000). This included decreased fear associated with being their true self (Peri et al., 2000). A separate study also revealed that participants on an extended polar expedition team demonstrated more positive personality characteristics towards the end of the expedition (Leon, 1991).

A separate, albeit less mentioned aspect of personal growth and development that was reported by participants, was the development of technical skills that were used often during the expedition. As was outlined in chapter two, the process of learning through experience – experiential learning, is regarded as an effective learning method (Mainemelis et al., 2002; Mok, 1999). Furthermore, the development of technical skills on an extended expedition has been reported by Stott and Hall (2007), who found that participants reported an increase in their technical skills after a six-week northern expedition. The development of canoeing skills specifically was reported during a canoeing-based wilderness program (Anderson et al., 1997). With the combination of

extended learning time and the experiential learning method, it is not surprising that participants reported an increase in their physical skills.

Personal growth and development over the course of a wilderness program is not a novel or surprising result. In fact, it would be unexpected and an anomaly if this did not happen. However, as previously mentioned, the personal growth that was experienced by participants was described often and at length. Participants reported that the changes they experienced within themselves impacted their mentality and behaviours towards the rest of the group. Thus, it was important to include a discussion of personal growth and development, even though it may appear here as a “tired” finding.

One question that does arise from these findings is the connection to the other shifts articulated by participants. For example, it is a commonplace theory that an increase in confidence can positively affect other aspects of an individual’s life. Thus, perhaps here too, some of the personal growth and development described by participants, impacted shifts that they felt in other areas. This potential correlation between personal development and the development of positive social interaction and positive relationships development could serve as an impetus for future research.

**Identification of important factors for change.** Participants often, and in detail, described their perceptions about which factors of the wilderness program led to the shifts and changes that they experienced in their inter and intra personal relationships. The four main factors that were reported by participants included (a) the wild and remote setting; (b) shared challenge; (c) sharing a unique experience; and (d) extended time with others. While this theme and its sub-themes does not directly address the purpose of this study, they do address one of the guiding questions – “What are the specific factors that

participants identify as significant to their report about how they feel in relation to others pre – and post – program?” Furthermore, these reports from participants are valuable in giving further insight into what Ewert (2000) described as a lack of research into the lived experiences of participants on a wilderness program in general.

A factor that participants often identified as important to the changes they experienced was the wild and remote setting. Participants referred to the setting as wild, beautiful, awe-inspiring, challenging and powerful. As two participants reported, being in such a beautiful and remote place with another person, created a special kind of bond.

In outdoor education and wilderness program literature, the wilderness component has been described as important to the discovery of oneself and others (Bertomali, 1981; Greffrath, Meyer, Strydom, & Ellis, 2011; Hopkins & Putnam, 1993; Russell & Hendee, 1997). Russell and Hendee (1997) described that the documented personal changes that occur during a wilderness program are dependent on the remote wilderness setting. The remoteness, removal from society and the naturalness of the setting were all important factors (Russell & Hendee, 1997). Even before this, Bertolami (1981) found that the positive personal change described by young adult participants after an extended, 26-day wilderness program, was attributed to the wilderness setting. Supporting this, Hopkins and Putnam (1993) described that remote wilderness settings have long since been described as a “powerful medium for exploring the nature of community” (p. 12). More recently, a study tested 28 young adults for personal effectiveness before and after their participation in either a residential, centre based outdoor program, or a wilderness expedition based program (Greffrath, Meyer, Strydom, & Ellis, 2011). Both programs had similar goals. The wilderness expedition-based program created greater

improvement to personal effectiveness on account of the wilderness context (Greffrath, Meyer, Strydom, & Ellis, 2011). Further to this, when a place is very different from an individual's local or normal setting, the ability to change in a variety of ways might be greater (Brown, 2008). Thus, participants' reports from this study concluding that the wilderness setting was an important factor for the changes they experienced is supported by past research, and in this area, have not produced any novel findings.

While the wilderness remains an important and powerful component of outdoor education, in the context of this present study, it is important to mention the disconnect between the use of the Canadian wilderness and overall social justice goals and ideals. In Canada, all wilderness (and all land) is the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples (Buckner, 2008). The taking (and "using") of these lands by white colonists was and remains undoubtedly an act of great social injustice. Thus, the act of non-Indigenous people using this land for programs such as the WLP can also be seen as an act of social injustice. This is an important point for wilderness program providers and group leaders to remember, and is important to discuss with participants on any wilderness program. Furthermore, I now look at the limited focus on native land rights in this present study as a limitation. Creating and examining a wilderness program that incorporates issues of native land rights into the curriculum may be an important focus for future research.

A second factor reported on by participants, one that helped to create positive interpersonal relationships, was the sense of challenge. As one participant described "the challenge brought us together." This concept is not novel to the field of wilderness programs or outdoor education in general – many have reported on this finding in the past. As early as 1968, Sherif and Sherif reported that a shared, challenging goal



facilitated teamwork and cooperation. A study of a wilderness expedition in the Himalayan mountain range also found that a shared, challenging goal was powerful in establishing group cohesiveness, further reporting that once the challenge was gone, group cohesion diminished (Allison, Duda, & Beuter, 1991). A more recent study by Sklar, Anderson and Autry (2006) has also outlined a positive correlation between challenge in an outdoor adventure program, and the development of community and relationships. Norton and Hsieh (2011) also found that a sense of shared adventure and challenge are effective in creating social bonds, and can actually bridge cultural gaps.

These findings lead me to question whether the results of this present study would have been similar if the wilderness program had been less challenging. Given the findings of Allison et al. (1991), I think not. Consequently, perhaps if a program is too challenging, learning cannot happen. Is there a point at which a program becomes too challenging, and learning cannot happen? Both of these questions would lead to interesting future research.

A third factor reported on by participants, one that also helped to create positive interpersonal relationships, was the uniqueness of the experience, and creating unique memories. Participants described that they felt a deep, positive bond with others on their wilderness program because the program was “a different life.” Participants also described a sense of shared, unique culture, including songs and humour, understood only by those that were part of their specific wilderness program. The development of a common *micro-culture* on remote expeditions had been well documented (Bouvel, 1999; Bouvel et al., 1991; Palinkas, 1986). These studies have also documented that the development of these micro-cultures coincides with more positive social interaction.

While the development of micro-culture can be interpreted in a positive way (Bouvel, 1999; Bouvel et al., 1991; Palinkas, 1986) there may also be the potential that the creation of a strong micro-culture on a wilderness program may hinder the ability for participants to bring learning back to their everyday lives, which, as mentioned in chapter four, was regarded as very important to participants. If the micro-culture is too different from the culture facing program participants when they return home, participants may not be able to see links between program life and everyday life, which may hinder their applications of new knowledge, which is necessary for the ability of participants to bring learning back to life (Beames & Atencio, 2008; Gass, 1999). The potential ability for participants to bring their leaning back to life is examined in more detail later in this chapter. A possible solution may be for program leaders to work to create links between participants' home lives and the micro-culture created on an expedition. Past researchers have also proposed similar solutions (Gass, 1999).

Moreover, a strong micro-culture with strong norms and values also has the potential to restrict individual's autonomy and expression of identity, which may also impede an understanding of the diverse social and cultural backgrounds of individuals in the group (Beames & Atencio, 2008). If this is the case, then the development of a strong micro-culture appears to be somewhat incongruent with certain foundations of social justice, specifically, understanding and appreciation of difference. Taking this into consideration, supporting the creation of micro-culture may still be advisable, so long as program leaders focus on incorporating participants' individual identities and backgrounds into the shared micro-culture.

The fourth and final factor that was reported by participants was the time spent together. The length of an outdoor education program, in correlation with interpersonal and intrapersonal growth in participants has previously been examined (Cason & Gillis, 1994; Hattie et al., 1997). In general, a positive correlation was uncovered between program length, and the positive impacts on participants (Hattie et al., 1997; Neill, 2008). More simply put, longer programs lead to greater positive impacts for participants. This leads me to question if there is a specific program length where learning is maximized. If the WLP program was extended by one week, two weeks, or even doubled in length, would the results have been more pronounced? Or, was the learning at a climax at the program's current length? Findings from the meta-analysis completed by Hattie et al. (1997) provide one possible answer. As mentioned above, Hattie et al. uncovered that program length was correlated to greater positive effects on the participants; this included programs that lasted up to 120 days. While this finding may not definitively provide a specific program length is where learning is maximized, it does inform this present study that results may have been more pronounced if the WLP was longer, even double its current length of 47 days.

Also worth mentioning here again is participants' lack of reporting on the leaders as being important to the changes they experienced. As discussed previously, there was little focus placed on the role of the leaders in this present study, which may have influenced participants to exclude them in their reporting. As stated above, this is a limitation of this present study.

**Bringing learning back to life.** The final additional finding that participants discussed as part of their experience was a sense of importance and desire to bring what

they had learned back into their everyday lives. In general, participants reported that the new positive view that they had of themselves and others was one that they wanted to bring back with them into their everyday lives. This notion of bringing learning back to everyday life is often described as *transfer of learning* (Gass, 1999). When examining the literature, I was disappointed with the too few examples that describe the simple *desire* of participants to transfer learning back to life. Still, there are some studies that do address, this theme, at least in part. In one study by Russell and Hendee (1997) an additional, but major finding was that participants expressed a desire to transfer their learning back into their everyday lives, including their new positive attitudes and newfound sense of communication. Correspondingly, the previously discussed study by Goldenberg, McAvoy, and Klenosky (2005) reported that participants predicted that there would be transference from the effects of the program into their everyday lives.

What seems to be of greater interest to researchers in the area of transfer of learning from wilderness program is the actual *ability* of participants to do so. The ability of participants to transfer learning from an outdoor or wilderness experiences has been described as one of the most important goals of these programs (Gass, 1999). John Dewey (1938) himself stated that the ability to apply learning to future situations distinguishes between learning that is meaningful and that which is not. In this present study, no formal conclusions can be drawn about the ability of participants to transfer their learning back into their everyday lives. However, as a participant in this present study, and one that has experienced significant amounts of elapsed time since my wilderness program, I can provide a unique perspective and discussion on the likelihood that transfer of learning may happen, and what might be done to support this transfer.

Upon reflecting on my experiences with returning home after my wilderness program experience, I found that:

I don't know if I went back home thinking that I was going to be different or be better, was it kind of just happened. I got along with my parents and my brother so much better. Maybe partly because I really did miss them, and was happy to see them, but also I think I really saw them in a new way. Saw their good qualities, and tried to let go of their bad qualities. I think I had realized a lot of my own weaknesses, well, more like they were pointed out to me. And it made it easier to see theirs, and forgive them. Even so many years later, I still owe a lot of my positive relationship with my parents to that program. I really think we would have travelled down a different path and that it wouldn't have lead anywhere good.

As the above passage alludes to, I was able to transfer my learning into everyday life.

Drawing from my own experiences, I believe this may have been due to the continued follow-up of my learning facilitated by my familial support system, chiefly my parents.

The continued discussions, debriefing and sharing of my learning helped me to successfully transfer this learning into my everyday life. Gass (1999) has also suggested that follow-up experiences are important to the ability of program participants to transfer their learning into everyday life.

As I look back now, nearly six years after my participation in my wilderness program, it is clear that the experiences I had with the development of certain foundations of social justice have affected my worldviews and influenced the meaning and value that I place on social justice and social justice issues. To name one example, my desire to explore social justice within this present study was a lasting impact of my experiences. I also find that the shift in the way I approach my relationships has remained with me. I feel that I have sustained a more positive relationship with my parents and that many of the new relationships I have formed over the years have been those of mutual respect, appreciation of difference, reciprocity, care, interdependence and cooperation.

Despite my own experiences, I still wonder if the other participants in this present study were able to follow through on their desires to transfer their learning into everyday life. In the WLP program, there is no follow-up component. Thus, the responsibility for creating follow-up experiences would rest mainly with the familial support system. As several participants were planning to leave for university or other residential programs shortly after their return home, the likelihood that they were able to engage in any ongoing discussions, debriefings or other follow-up experiences is low.

A separate issue that can be considered is that while participants in this present study may or may not be receiving follow-up experiences, it will also be difficult to incorporate new learning into the pre-existing roles of participants. Despite the shifts in their own roles they may have experienced during the wilderness program, upon returning home old roles and expectations will be waiting for them. Thinking back upon my own experiences, while I was able to transfer some learning, the roles I filled with my family and friends were still waiting for me upon my return, and it was difficult to incorporate my new learning into my old roles. The initial expectations of my friends and family relating to how I would and should behave were challenging to overcome.

Perhaps the ideal solution would be to engage students in these programs in the summer before they move away from home and to provide organization-sponsored follow-up experiences with participants, no matter where they are living. Providing follow-up experiences may help participants to transfer their learning into their everyday lives at an important time when they are meeting new people and creating new roles for themselves. Both the potential for transfer of learning, and the barriers to transfer of learning described above may have implications for those wanting to participate in

wilderness programs, and wilderness program providers both, who are hoping to maximize the transfer of learning. Possible solutions aside, at this point, there is no way to assess whether participants received any follow-up experiences to assist their transfer of learning, or to assess whether transfer of learning did indeed happen. As previously mentioned, this represents another limitation of this present study, and a topic for future research.

### **Conclusion**

Many conclusions have been drawn from the results and discussion of this present study. The following presents an overall synthesis of those conclusions to summarize the results and discussion of this present study. The results of this study suggest that, due to a variety of factors, participants did experience the development of positive relationships; those based on reciprocity, appreciation of difference, interdependence and cooperation. These are congruent with certain foundations of social justice. However, this congruency may not fully equate to participants being socially just per se, or equate with gains in knowledge about the values and beliefs of social justice. There still remain questions about “next steps” specific to transforming the developments of positive relationships, reciprocity, appreciation of difference, interdependence and cooperation into the development of the foundations of social justice – both relational and distributive justice (see Figure 2). As mentioned earlier, this unanswered question represents one limitation of this present study, and would serve as perhaps the most important next step for future research.

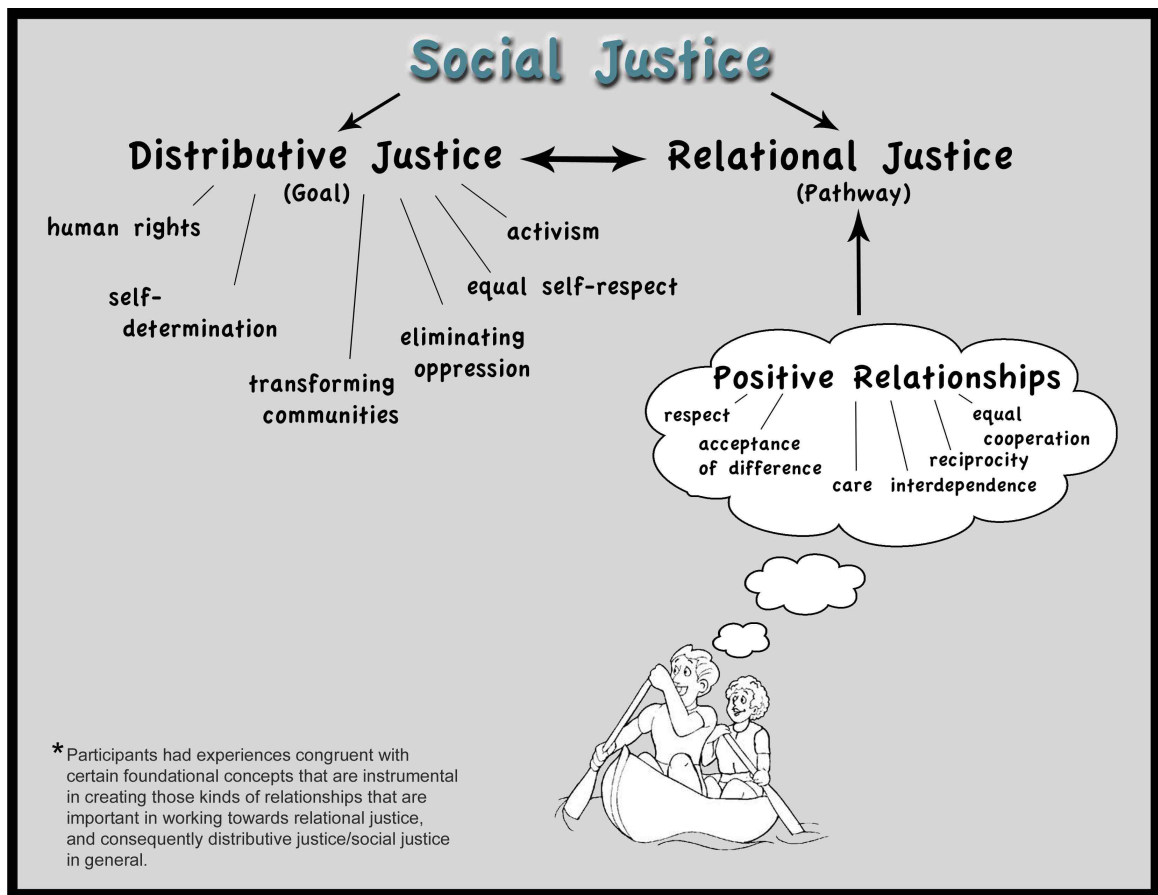


Figure 2. Relationship of participants' experiences with relational and distributive justice.

### Researcher Reflections

This study both challenged and strengthened my own preconceptions about the learning that happens on wilderness programs. By this, I mean that I found what I thought I would, but not in the ways I was expecting. My own experiences told me that participating in wilderness programs would instill values and experientially teach concepts that were congruent with the foundations of social justice. In this present study, this did happen. However, it was not so "clean" as I had originally anticipated. I had thought that learning would happen through positive interactions and experiences of interdependence, cooperation and reciprocity. However, while participants did describe experiencing these concepts, many of them were experienced through conflict, struggle,



anger, and sadness. Thus, while participants did arrive at a similar end result that I had predicted, the experiences associated with getting there were drastically different from my own, and my preconceptions. Perhaps the most valuable lessons are often the hardest to learn.

Overall, I maintain that wilderness programs can be an effective and meaningful way to experience the concepts of appreciation of difference, cooperation, reciprocity, respect and interdependence, which are congruent with certain foundations of social justice. However, as I have learned, I would also urge others not to oversimplify this learning process, or the importance of the next steps that lend themselves to an explicit understanding of the foundations of social justice. The process of completing this study was both empowering and humbling. I feel privileged to have not only experienced something so powerful, but also to have been able to make sense of my own and others' experiences – to have my experiences and thoughts both reaffirmed and challenged in new ways.

### **Creative Synthesis**

Creative synthesis is the zenith of the researcher's quest to understand a phenomenon or experience (Moustakas, 1990). This final process occurs after the researcher has fully investigated the experiences and has deciphered themes and meanings. The creative synthesis is a creative work that expresses the essence of the experiences of the participants and the findings of the study (Moustakas, 1990). Most often, the creative synthesis takes a written form, using the participants' own words (Moustakas, 1990). For this present study, I wanted to create something that would not only compliment and summarize the findings of this present study, but also reintegrate

some of the participants emotions that may unavoidably get lost when writing a research paper. I chose poetry as the medium to do this. Despite my reservations about never having written a poem, my choice was solidified upon reading Robert Frost's conviction that "poetry is what gets lost in translation" (cited by Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998, p. 57). Throughout the course of this present study, information has been translated and retranslated numerous times – the translation of experiences into thoughts, of thoughts into words, of words into stories, of stories into findings and of findings into conclusions. Although I am confident that *information* was effectively translated, certain feelings, moods or emotions may have, as Frost put it, been lost through these translations.

I hope to replenish some of what may have been lost along the way, and I believe that the poem I have created is the final piece of the puzzle that is needed to complete the full picture of this present study. I wanted to construct something that summarized the overall experiences of participants and the themes of this present study, while simultaneously conveying certain participant emotions that may not have come through in the individual or composite depictions. To do this effectively, I felt that my words alone would not be sufficient. I extracted words and phrases from participant journals and interviews that conveyed emotions, sentiments and moods at different stages of the program and arranged them chronologically to create eight stanzas. Words and phrases from every participant are used throughout.

The following poem tells the story of a physical, mental and emotional journey of a group of people, not only to a new destination, but also to a new way of seeing things. This story is one of insecurity, fear, frustration and anger, but it is also one of patience, understanding, learning and kindness. When I see the words of each stanza, I hear them

coming from each participant – the distinct voice of each coming through their words.

This reminds me how intricately connected they each are to the product of this present study, and how instrumental they were in shaping it. The last stanza has been created using only my own words. This stanza represents the importance of my own wilderness program experience to me personally and the lasting impacts that it has had on me.

As someone who is intimately familiar with all aspects of this study, I feel that the following poem accurately captures the essence of participants' experiences and the themes of this present study as well as my own experiences years after the program. However more than this, it connects participants' stories to their raw emotion, and to the emotions of the reader. It is my hope that it introduces something new as well, even after 200 pages.

So nervous – uncomfortable  
different people  
from so many different walks of life  
didn't know where I would fit in.  
a big separation  
by myself

clashing personalities  
constantly bash heads  
food stressed  
so long to do ANYTHING  
tempers flaring  
this wasn't how I pictured it

angry  
tired  
hungry  
hungry  
HUNGRY

work out the problems  
my ideas count for something  
we talked a lot  
you can just be different, and that's ok

they have valuable things to say  
respect

portages were crazy  
hard days of paddling  
alone together – there's no one else  
so much time with these people  
gorgeous mountains – we were all astounded  
bullshit seems kinda insignificant

relationships change – now it feels real  
you see them, you really see who they are  
no barriers, no walls anymore  
I opened my heart  
I love those guys  
our own little family

it's not just me out there  
selfish isn't an option  
I need these people  
we can be more successful together  
looking out for each other  
we are in the same boat

I learned a lot about others  
I learned a lot about myself  
learned to work together  
I will take this with me forever  
I am a new person  
changed

weeks, months, years  
faces fade, memories weaken  
yet something remains  
how I see you now, how I treat you now  
go now, out into the world  
take this, use this, share this

### **Closing Comments**

The journeys that both I, and the other participants took part in were as unique as each individual. Yet, the message that came from those experiences was similar – I have changed; I see myself in relation to others differently. The participants may go into the

world and create positive, reciprocal interdependent relationships, or they may not. But they have experienced the development of these types of relationships, these congruencies with the foundations of social justice, and what they do with this is up to them.

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**Appendix A – Letter of Invitation [printed on Brock U. letterhead]**

[insert date]

Participant Name

Participant Address

**Title of Study:** Wild Civility: Cultivating Social Justice through Participation in a Wilderness Program**Principal Investigator:** Erica Hamel, Master of Arts Student, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Mary Breunig, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University**Dear:** [insert name],

I, Erica Hamel, Master of Arts Student, from the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences at Brock University invite you to participate in a research project titled *Wild Civility: Cultivating Social Justice through Participation in a Wilderness Program*. The purpose of this research is to explore if participants' reports about how their knowledge and beliefs about issues of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation in a wilderness program.

As a registered participant in [The Company's] Wilderness Leadership Program, you are in a unique position to share your experiences about how your participation on your wilderness program contributes to how you view yourself in relation to others pre- and post- program. I would like to invite you to share your experiences by participating in this research project, which will take place from June to August, 2010 at [The Company's] base camp. I propose to collect information in two different ways. First, I would like to hold two interviews with you to discuss your experiences with the program – one pre-program and one post-program. Interviews will be audio recorded. Second, I would like to ask you to keep a journal during program participation. I will be asking you to record in a journal for at least 10 minutes each night. A journal and journal guide with specific questions will be provided.

Individual names or identifying characteristics will not be used in this study. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym and this pseudonym will be attached to both the participants' interview transcripts and participant journals. Journals will be returned to participants when the data analysis is complete and interview transcripts will be deleted and shredded. Although other participants in the study, other WLP participants who are not participating in the study, and the WLP leaders will be aware of

your participation, outside of the WLP group, your individual anonymity will be protected.

It is my hope that your reports and this study will add to a body of knowledge about the outcomes of wilderness program participation.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Brock University Research Ethics Officer (905 688-5550 ext 3035, [reb@brocku.ca](mailto:reb@brocku.ca))

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly or my advisor.

Thank you,

Erica Hamel, Dr. Mary Breunig

MA Student, Brock University, Associate Professor, Brock University

(905) 932 6863, 905-688-5550 ext. 5387

[erica.hamel@brocku.ca](mailto:erica.hamel@brocku.ca), [m.breunig@brocku.ca](mailto:m.breunig@brocku.ca)

**Appendix B – Informed Consent [printed on Brock U. letterhead]**

[insert date]

Participant Name

Participant Address

**Title of Study:** Wild Civility: Cultivating Social Justice through Participation in a Wilderness Program**Principal Investigator:** Erica Hamel, Master of Arts Student, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University**Faculty Supervisor:** Dr. Mary Breunig, Faculty of Applied Health Sciences, Brock University**Dear: [participant name]**

You are invited to participate in a study that involves research. The purpose of this study is explore if participants' reports about how their knowledge and beliefs about issues of social justice and how participants view themselves in relation to others shift as a result of their participation in a wilderness program.

**WHAT'S INVOLVED**

As a participant, you will be asked to attend a short briefing session upon arrival at [The Company] base camp. Before your wilderness expedition, you will be asked to complete a 45-minute interview. At your interview, you will be provided with a journal and a list of questions you may wish to consider writing about. You will be asked to write in your journal a minimum of 10 minutes each night while at base camp and while on your wilderness program. A journal guide with specific questions will be provided. Upon your return from the wilderness expedition you will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview. Both interviews will be audio recorded. Your total participation will require approximately 2 hours of your time while at base camp, and 10 minutes of your time each night while you are on the wilderness expedition portion of your program. You will also be asked to review the interview transcript in the fall, which may require approximately ½ hour of your time.

**POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND RISKS**

One possible benefit of participation in this study is that you will likely gain increased insight into your own experiences and a chance to reflect on and discuss your experiences with an experienced wilderness program facilitator. It is my hope that your reports and this study will add to a body of knowledge about the outcomes of wilderness program participation. There are no known or anticipated risks associated with participation in this



study.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information you provide will be kept confidential. Although other participants in the study, other WLP participants who are not participating in the study, and the WLP leaders will be aware of your participation, outside of the WLP group, your individual anonymity will be protected. Your name will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study; however, with your permission, a pseudonym and anonymous quotations will be used. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of both the interview and journal transcripts, which will provide you with an opportunity to add or clarify any points that may have been misrepresented. Data collected during this study will be stored both on the password protected personal computer of the primary researcher, and in the locked office of the faculty supervisor. Data will be kept for seven years at which time all electronic data will be deleted and all paperwork (i.e. consent forms) will be shredded. Journals will be returned to you when the thesis work is completed [likely September, 2011]. Access to this data will be restricted to myself, Erica Hamel, and the faculty supervisor, Mary Breunig.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you wish, you may decline to answer any questions or participate in any component of the study. Further, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time and may do so without any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

### **PUBLICATION OF RESULTS**

Results of this study may be published in professional journals and presented at conferences. Feedback about this study will be available through the primary researcher (contact information listed below).

### **CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE**

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please contact the Principal Investigator or the Faculty Supervisor using the contact information provided above. If you have any comments or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Research Ethics Office at (905) 688-5550 Ext. 3035, reb@brocku.ca.

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

Erica Hamel, Dr. Mary Breunig

MA Student, Brock University, Associate Professor, Brock University

(905) 932 6863, 905-688-5550 ext. 5387

erica.hamel@brocku.ca, m.breunig@brocku.ca

**CONSENT FORM**

I agree to participate in the study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parental consent (if participant is under 18)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix C – First Interview Guide**

Welcome the participant to the interview portion. Describe the process of the interview, and the recording device.

1. How are you liking your time here so far? (Introductory question)
2. What has been your favourite activity so far?
3. What are your previous experiences with wilderness programs?
4. Did these experiences lead to new feelings with/ insights into your relationship to the group? Describe.
5. Did you notice any changes in yourself in relation to others during this experience?
6. Describe this phenomena.
  - how, why, location, people, additional factors...
7. How do you think that these experiences will impact the present experiences of this program?
8. What are your expectations of what you will learn about yourself and about others during this program?

I will close the interview by asking if the participant has anything else they would like to discuss.

I will also take this opportunity to ask if he/she has any questions or concerns about the data collection process in general.

### **Appendix D – Second Interview Guide**

Welcome the participant to the interview portion. Describe the process of the interview, and the recording device.

1. How was your trip? (Introductory question)
2. In general what kinds of feelings do you have when you think of the WLP group?
3. Are these feelings different from the beginning of the program?
4. Why/Why not?
5. Describe your experiences with others in the group over the course of the program.
  - use prompts from journal
6. Has this experience led to increased insight into your relationships with other people in the group?
7. Describe this phenomenon, (or lack thereof)
  - how, why, location, people, additional factors...
8. Describe a particular experience/event which exemplifies this phenomenon.
9. Do you feel like you have personally changed in any way?
10. Was this a positive or negative experience overall? Why?

This interview will also be informed by the individual journal entries from that participant. Specific questions will be drafted before the interview. I will close the interview by asking if the participant has anything else he/she would like to discuss about his/her experience or otherwise.

### Appendix E – Journal Guidelines

The following questions will be cycled through over the course of the 47-day program. Thus, once a cycle of the full seven days has been completed, participants will return to the first question again. If a participant misses a day, he/she will continue the next day with the missed question.

#### Day 1

List ten words that first come to mind when you reflect on the group. Pick three of the most accurate words (in your own mind) and briefly elaborate on them (i.e. why do you think you chose them? What feelings do these words evoke? Are these words linked in your mind to any specific events?).

#### Day 2

Please create a visual representation (i.e. drawing, abstract design, anything else!) of your feelings about the group as a whole. Briefly describe your artwork.

#### Day 3

Choose a metaphor for your position in relation to the group this week. Describe why you chose this metaphor.

#### Day 4

Reflect on your feelings about yourself in relation to the group. Reflect on any specific events/experiences that contributed to a shift in the way you feel about yourself in relation to the group, and the group as a whole.

#### Day 5

Please write a poem (can be any kind of poem) about your most vivid experience (can be a positive or negative experience) with a member of the group, or the entire group together.

#### Day 6

What have been some of the recent barriers to relationship development in the group? Have you been able to work through these?

#### Day 7

Briefly re-read your journals from the past 6 days. Do you notice any patterns or similar themes? Has there been a shift in the way you are reflecting on yourself in relation to others in the past six days?

*Alternatives:* If you do not feel able or willing to answer certain questions, you may choose to answer another question for that day, or simply journal about your experiences that day in general.